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The victory of God

THE VICTORY OF GOD

REV. JAMES REID, M.A.

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BY

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THE VICTORY OF GOD

THE VICTORY OF GOD IN THE DISASTERS OF LIFE

"And Joseph said, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."—Gen. l. 19, 20.

FROM his youth upwards we recognize in Joseph a man with a great soul. He has all the marks of it. He never falls beneath his best. He is always the same, whether you meet him in a prison or in a palace. His circumstances, whatever they may be, become a background for his qualities, as the night becomes a background for the stars. In a moment of blinding temptation he is the soul of chivalry. In a prison, where he was kept for years, his greatness makes its mark, and he comes to the front. In the national crisis in Egypt, when they are faced with famine, he takes the situation in hand and saves the country. The stiffest test of a really great soul is the hour of prosperity. "It takes a steady hand to carry a full cup." Perhaps that is the reason why God often sends with the success that may come to us, something to humble us, to steady us, to keep us alive to Him, and open to the movings of His spirit. In any case prosperity only emphasizes the sterling quality of Joseph. In this hour which our story describes, his greatness outshines itself. That is the only way

to put it; it outshines itself and reveals, behind him and through him, the face of God.

It might have been a tempting moment for many another man. His brothers were absolutely in his power. His father, for whom he had a tremendous affection, was dead, and no longer there to protect them or appeal for tenderness. They had all come back from the funeral wondering how it was going to be with them now, when there was no one to stand between them and the wind of their ill-desert. And they came cringing to Joseph, whining for kindly treatment. It takes a great man to forget the wrongs of youth when the iron entered into the soul, yet Joseph did it. It takes a greater man to confess to those who have wronged him that the injury they did turned out to his advantage, yet Joseph did that. "Fear not," he said, "am I in the place of God? As for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to save much people alive."

Two motives toward magnanimity are suggested here, two things that helped Joseph to forgive, and it is well that in days like these we should get hold of them. For magnanimity to-day, as then, may be the pivot on which our future turns; and a day like this the background against which God is giving us the chance to reveal our souls. One of these motives which powerfully moved Joseph was that God was at work upon those who had injured him. "Am I in the place of God, that I should take revenge?" It was as if he said: This work of punishment is none of my business. It is a perilous position for any man to take up that he is the instrument of the judgment of God. There are crimes that are far too big for us to assess. God

is working out there beyond us, in the hearts of those who have wronged us as well as in our own. His mills are grinding out resistlessly the judgments of righteousness. The justice of God is a net from which no evil-doer can escape. George Eliot in *Romola* gives us a terrible picture of a man tracked down by his sin. The father he had wronged becomes possessed by a passion of hate, whose haunting persistence turns the blood cold. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of a hate like that. There is only one thing more terrible, and that is to be the hater himself. For hate desolates both wronged and wrong-doer. But the justice of God is far more sure and unerring, for it is the justice of love, a love that will not let men go, but follows them still through all the wandering mazes of their flight from it, till it brings them face to face with sin, that it may bring them to redemption. It is this vision of God behind the scenes that calms the heart and takes away the restless heat of rancour and revenge. When a man is sure of God and has seen a vision of the love which is justice, his soul is swept clean of all bitterness. Has not the time come for us to think of our late foes with something of Joseph's spirit? Reparation is right and just, but is not the craving to make Germany suffer, in many cases another form of faithlessness towards God and the moral forces of life? When we remember Edith Cavell's heroism it is well to remember her magnanimity. "This I would say, standing before God and eternity, we must have no hatred or bitterness toward any one." "Standing before God and eternity." That is where Joseph stood—before God and eternity, seeing the mighty sweep of the moral forces which are the nature of

things. And it was because he saw God working in and through things, that he was able to forget the past and put it behind him. "Fear not," he said, "am I in the place of God?"

But another thing made it easy for him to lay aside the past and rise above the pettiness of a puny revenge. He had seen how God was handling the wrongs he had suffered, to make them work together for good. He had been cruelly treated by his brothers, taken a helpless youth and sold into slavery, but that wrong did not stand alone in his mind. It had become the vital link in a chain of events which had made him Prime Minister of Egypt. He saw again through the mist of years his father's broken heart as he bowed his head to the inevitable and looked into a grave. But that picture did not stand alone. For that mysterious fate that snatched away Jacob's son, swung back in his old age to rescue him from starvation, and bring him to the proudest day of his life. God was working ceaselessly, taking the savage wrongs and building them up into the structure of a mighty purpose for Joseph and for the world. Can you wonder that his soul was lit with gratitude and worship which swept all bitterness clean out of his life? It did not abate in his mind one jot of his brothers' sin. They had done it and done it deliberately. They were no mere puppets in the hands of a master who made them dance to his tune. They were no mere helpless tools in the giant grip of God. They were men who thought out their sin and deliberately carried out their design. It was not God's will that they should wrong their brother for his good. They sinned against their brother and they sinned against God. But God took the wrong they

did and used it for His purpose, adapting it, out of His loving power, to His great design. Against the background of their treachery, dark and bloody as it was, there shone out a victorious love, riding upon the storm and triumphing through the catastrophe. "Ye meant evil unto me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive."

Now does not this experience of Joseph throw a wonderful light upon the darkness which shrouds many a life to-day? There is a problem which is ever with us, the problem of the evil of the world and the goodness of God. Sometimes it sleeps for a while, but again and again it awakens and tears at the vitals of some sensitive soul. How can the evil of our life be reconciled with the goodness of God? Why has He allowed this thing which has happened to us to come to pass? Why has He permitted this wrong, this sickness, this accident, this savage crime, which has broken into our happiness? There is a whole host of problems here which are too deep for us. But there is light in this word of Joseph. The root of the trouble for many people, when we come to look into it, is a wrong view of Providence. We are still living in Old Testament days, when the blessing of God was bound up with prosperity and a shallow sort of happiness. We think of Providence as a power of love which looks after us as a mother looks after her toddling child, and keeps it out of harm's way. We forget that we are not children any more, but men and women whom God is training to play a big part somewhere, and training to give Him back a love which shall be strong and independent and worthy of His own. That means a hard school and a long schooling. What a tremendous thing is

this love of His—a thing so wonderful that it will use every kind of means to make us what we are able to be, even the graving tool of pain and the hammer blows of misfortune—a love which can adapt anything in the experience of such a world as this to its great designs!

One thing too we must be clearer about, and that is God's relation to the evil that happens to us. A good many people have the fixed idea that it is God who is directly behind all that comes to them. "God took him" they will say when their child dies through accident or disease, and they either resign themselves to what they think the will of God in a resignation which brings peace, even at the cost of truth; or else they become bitter and pettish, thinking hard thoughts of God, as if, somehow, He need not have done this if He had had a little more love or been a little more attentive to their case. There is a half-truth here when a mother says of her dead boy, "God took him." God took him, indeed, but only when death had released him, but that is not to say that God engineered the cause which killed him. Calamities come in many ways. Sometimes they come through sheer accident — a storm at sea, a passing sickness, and the like. But when we look into these things, what are they? They are just the other side of the privilege and the joy of living in such a world as this. It is just the possibility of joy that brings the possibility of pain. If we had no nerves which could throb with exquisite pain we could never thrill with exquisite joy. If there were no spice of risk in life there would be no zest of adventure. Two years ago a brave airman flew out across the wide spaces of the Atlantic,

making the first attempt to cross. Had he succeeded it would have been a triumph, which would have set the type dancing in all our newspapers. What made the possibility of triumph, but just the chance of death lurking in these wide spaces? It is a glorious world we live in; and the sickness, and the risk, and the calamities which happen by sea and land, are the price we pay for the privilege of vital living.

And there is evil which comes through the sin and malice of others or their callousness and neglect. Are we going to make God responsible for these? If a nurse is careless of her patient, shall we blame God for his death? If a surgeon's hand is unsteady, shall we accuse God of callousness? If a nation forgets the duty of neighbourliness and grows big with lust of power, and fills the air with poison gas, and wrecks the earth with high explosives, shall we call it an act of God? When Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, was it God's doing or God's will? The injury others have the power to do us is the price we pay for those social relationships which make the world fragrant when they are sweet and loving, and poison it with bitterness when they break down. When these things are done you can be sure of this, they are done in defiance of God's will. They are not God's original way. They are not God's plan. They are done in spite of the pleading voices and guiding light within, by which God seeks to win men to the higher way. And when they are done, they are part of a Cross which God carries in His heart, the Cross of love resisted, of righteousness defied, of truth dishonoured. They are the currents of human passion which run athwart God's gracious will, and threaten shipwreck to His creation. And God's load

is big enough to carry without adding to it our reproach or our complaints. If only we could grasp *that*, would it not awaken a new desire to come to God's side, to help Him with what strength we have, against the foes that darken His universe?

But there is another thing we need to grasp, and this is the point, God is not helpless amid the wreckage of His plans. The world is no derelict ship. Our broken lives are not lost though they have been driven from their course. God's love is working still, and He comes in and takes the wrong that was done and the calamity that came, no matter how, and uses them victoriously, working out His wonderful plan of love. That is God's victory. He is always master of the situation. There are no second bests with God for the man who puts his broken life into His hands. There is infinite resourcefulness in the Almighty love. There is a divine ingenuity in the grace of God. "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring it to pass as it is this day."

History is full of examples of this very miracle of the victorious Love. How many lives have been redeemed from failure into a splendid success! Here is a woman whose life has been crippled by sorrow, and she becomes the foundress of a hospital. Here is a man whose career is blasted by blindness, and he gives himself up, body and soul, to work for the blind as if he had been equipped for this very hour and this very work. Sir Arthur Pearson has written a fascinating book upon St. Dunstan's. He calls it *Victory over Blindness*. His work is indeed a victory, not only for thousands whom he has lifted from despair into a new life, but for himself also—and behind all, for God. Could any other man have done the

work he has done? Could his life have been lived to such purpose if he had kept the divine gift of eyesight? Who can tell? No one will dare to say the calamity was predestined, but things being as they are, God took the situation in hand. The result is nothing less than a victory of God, shaping a calamity into an equipment, opening out a cul-de-sac, a dead-end, into a field of glorious service, for which there was no other opening, and setting the man into it wonderfully gifted with sympathy and appeal. Or here is Paul, taken by cruel hands, which would have crushed him as they would have crushed a fly, and flung into a prison at Rome; and he makes that prison a pulpit from which his words resound through Europe. It was not God who shut him in that prison. But it was God who used that prison.

And, of course, there is the supreme example, the Cross of Christ Himself. I remember being at a camp meeting where questions were invited on religious problems, and a man immediately spoke up. It was the old question. "How is it," he asked, "that the Bible tells us that Judas betrayed Christ and condemns him for betraying Christ, and yet the Bible also says that Christ, in dying, fulfilled the plan of salvation? Was Judas a mere tool?—then why was he condemned; or was he a deliberately treacherous sinner?—then how could his treachery be in the plan of God?" You see the difficulty. Joseph found out the answer long ago. It is the victory of love. That love of God took up the treachery of Judas and the cruelty of men defying love, and made them the means of a sacrifice by which love conquers the world. They meant it unto evil against Him. It was not God's

will that they should do it. Let us get rid of that thought. It was God's agony. It was God's crucifixion; but God meant it, shaped it, redeemed it unto good to save much people alive.

But there is a final point we must notice. This victory of God does not always happen. It is not inevitable. Before you can understand it, you have to think of Joseph and see the kind of man he was. If Joseph had got bitter, if he had said to himself when he was wronged, that it was useless trying to do anything with his life which had been so shamefully marred, he would have ended his days a slave. There are people who are the sport of trouble, and have gone under just because they have taken the bitter and pettish attitude to life, or have lost heart, or have given up trying to make anything out of it. There are plenty of rocks around for a ship whose captain has left the bridge because he has been driven out of his course. But Joseph stood up to his trouble, and kept his faith clear, and his life clean towards God. He kept himself in touch with the Almighty love, linked himself up with the Almighty will, and looked for chances of helping out the purpose he was sure God still had for him. And that alertness, that faith, that willingness to co-operate with God and to make the best of every situation because he knew God could help him make the best of it, were the means by which God's love at last made him what he became. If God is to be victorious through our broken lives, we must help Him all we can. We must put ourselves into His hands. We must rise to the call of His purpose at every turn that offers. We must, in fact, take everything as if it came from Him and see in everything

the workings of His love. For, indeed, everything does become the working of love when we put life into the hands of God. That is the glorious fact. Everything that comes to us becomes mighty for love's own designs in the hands of God. That outlook changes everything. It changes the effect of trouble upon ourselves. It makes it beautiful. Some one once said to a man whose body was crippled by a disease of childhood, "Affliction does so colour the life." "Yes," he said, "but I propose to choose the colour." That is the point. It is ours to choose the colour; or, rather, it is ours to choose the Artist, and He chooses the colour. And wonderful beyond description is the beauty which the genius of Christ brings forth in us by the tools of calamity and sorrow, when we put life into His hands. Do I speak to any who are weighed down by some load of grief or handicapped by some trial, who see nothing before them but the slow numbing which the years will bring, or the final release of death from a world which is all upset? Your one hope is in linking up your life with this Almighty will of love revealed in Christ. The key to this victory is loyalty —loyalty to the victorious and redeeming will of love. As Mr. Clutton Brock puts it, "Salvation is seeing that the Universe is good, and becoming a part of that goodness"; or, as Paul puts it, "All things work together for good to them that love God." In other words, those who accept the purpose of God in Christ and give themselves to it in loyal faith and service, find there the secret of a continual victory—a victory in which life, with all it holds of joy or woe, becomes subdued to the mighty mastery of love. "And this is the victory that overcomes the world."

THE GOSPEL OF THE RESURRECTION

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour."—Acts v. 30.

THE resurrection of Christ is the most challenging fact of history. It is a miracle of such tremendous quality that all the other miracles of the Gospel story pale beside it into insignificance. Time was when a preacher on Easter morning would have given himself to build up arguments for the truth of the resurrection. And, indeed, there are many arguments which could be brought forward. There is the argument of the New Testament *book*. You cannot account for this book except by the fact of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. And there is the argument of the New Testament *men*. You cannot account for Peter and Paul—the difference between the men they were and the men they became—except by way of a miracle, and that miracle is the miracle of Christ risen. Their whole life and personality became what they were because their hearts were kindled by the vision of the risen Christ, as flame is caught from flame.

But there is not so much need to-day to argue for the resurrection. The outlook of thinking men has widened. Scientific men used to argue against it. They used to close up the universe against the possibility of God and deny any value to spiritual

experience outside their own explanation. They have given up this line of argument to-day. Life is far too wonderful a thing for any man to reduce it to a system and cry to faith, "Hands off!" The very fact that some scientific men are turning to spiritualism with such wistfulness shows a new openness of mind toward the wonders of the spiritual world. We are beginning to see that once we admit the fact of Christ and open up our souls to the kind of being He is, anything may happen. Anything may happen when you are in the presence of one like Christ. Healings may happen, and the casting out of demons, and the opening of blind eyes, and there is nothing so very incredible in the fact that Christ should rise from the dead.

What we ought to be concerned about most of all, then, to-day, is not the truth of this fact but the meaning of this fact. What does it mean? What lay behind it? That was one of the things which the apostles, and especially Paul, set themselves to think out. What tremendous power was it that lay behind the resurrection? What was it that was happening there in that sealed tomb from which Christ came forth at last glorious in His risen life? The answer the Bible gives us in phrase after phrase is just this. It was a creative act of God. It was a new revelation of the living power of the living God. That, it says to us, is the kind of God with whom we have to do. We had learned something about Him before. We had learned that He is a God of righteousness, of purity, of truth—of righteousness and truth so unbending that Christ went to His Cross rather than yield one iota before the forces of the world. And we had learned that He is a God

of love. That is the message of Calvary. He is a God of love to the uttermost, of love that forgives the vilest, of love that seeks to the very last limit, and goes on loving when everything seems hopeless. But when Christ rose again we learned this, that this Spirit of righteousness and love is also the secret of power, able to unlock the gates of death, and turn the forces of nature into an instrument of His Will. This is the final solution of the discussion we have been having these last years about might and right. Now we get it clear. They are both one in God. Go back to God and the source of both is in Him. Might is right, and right is might, when you strike the fountain head. In the last resort love and righteousness are the only might, the only omnipotence. A spiritl ike that of Jesus holds the key to every prison house of sin and suffering. He taps the resources of God by which every stronghold of evil which has mocked our puny science with its impassive walls, is at last overthrown. When He steps into the world, a spiritual factor comes into play which changes the whole situation. Having dominion over sin through His fellowship with God, he had found the secret of dominion over disease and death. For when evil had done its worst and its storm and passion had gathered all its forces—social, military, political, ecclesiastical—to put Him to death, the spirit of love and righteousness laid hold of that broken body in a stone-walled tomb and became triumphant and glorious in the risen Christ. "Whom, therefore, they slew and hanged on a tree, Him God raised from the dead and exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour."

Now when the apostles set themselves to think

out all the meaning of that fact, they simply could not find words to put it in. Life is not long enough to explore its riches. What may not happen with such a God as that at work in Christ? Did you ever think of it? Why are we so slow to believe in the possibilities of the spiritual world? Why are we so difficult to convince of a future life? Why is it that men and women are running to spiritualism to-day and coming back with a handful of chaff and telling the world about "a new revelation"? Why is it we have so many difficulties and doubts about God and about His ways with men? Is it not just because we have never apprehended the kind of God whom the New Testament reveals? We have never opened our mind and our imagination to the God who is revealed in the Cross and in the Resurrection of Christ. It is a new vision of God we need. We are far too much occupied with our own moods and tenses, our own feelings and fears and difficulties, and all the whispered doubts and objections of a foolish world, which is saying "There is no God" when what it often means is "There is no God for me." Life would begin to blaze for us with all kinds of wonders if only we took time to steep our souls in such a vision of God as we find in the resurrection of Jesus. Listen to the apostles as they look death in the face. Listen to what they say of it because they had seen the glory of God in the face of the risen Christ. He hath abolished death—made it of no account. For them there was no such thing any more. If they had gone to one of our churchyards to-day, or to the battlefields of Flanders, with all their "teeming crosses, row on row," what would they have said of it? Would they

not have said what one of our mystics said of a certain city cemetery, when a friend remarked to him how full it was becoming. "Full," he said, "it is the emptiest place in all England!" He hath abolished death. There is nothing in its dissolution which can touch the living spirit, nothing in it which can stand between friend and friend. There is nothing in it which can check the vital energy of a man who is living with any breath in him of this victorious creative Spirit of God. "He hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel."

But that did not nearly exhaust the meaning of the resurrection for these disciples. They were more interested in life than in death. There is a kind of faith in the resurrection which turns this life into a mere vestibule to eternity, a corridor to heaven That was not the way in which the apostles looked at it. The resurrection had a meaning for life, and it is this. It meant the possibility of a new life here and now, a risen life, a new quality of being. They saw how the Spirit of God had come forth into this broken body and had changed it and made of it somehow—all marred and wounded as it was—a vehicle for His Spirit. And they said to themselves: If this is the God with whom we have to do, this new creating God, who lives in the risen Christ, what manner of men ought we to be, what manner of men is it not possible for us to be, what manner of life is it not possible for us to live, and what manner of things is it not possible for us to do, with such a Prince and a Saviour! The world began to palpitate with all kinds of victorious possibilities. Life became romantic with adventure.

There are three great new hopes which rise from this resurrection fact and meet us in our world to-day.

The first is a new hope for the individual, the hope of resurrection to a new quality of life. As the Spirit of God came into that wounded and broken body of Christ, can not the Spirit of God come forth into our lives, all stained and broken as they are, and raise them to a new quality of being, make of them indeed, a new creation? This was the faith which Paul was always preaching. Christ rose again, he said. Do not hold that far off from you as a fact for some future hour when God shall call forth the dead. See in it a fact for to-day. Reckon yourselves as dead unto sin and alive unto God. Where did he learn it? He learned it in his own experience. That was what had happened to him along the Damascus road. His old life had been left behind like grave-clothes in a tomb, and a new life had come in like a breath of God and taken possession of his nature, making of him a new creation. That too was what had happened to Peter. He had betrayed his Lord. His old life was stained with failure. He was heart-broken with the sense of his own defeat. And when Christ rose again and sent Him a special message as if nothing had come between them, a new life awoke, making him the daring, devoted, convincing, and steadfast apostle of the Crucified, before whose courage men were astonished at the light of Christ that shone in it.

This is the message of the resurrection for us to-day. It means the possibility of a risen life for every man. It means that God with Whom we have to do can come into our life as He came in the risen Christ. He can take us as we are, stained

with sin, broken by sorrow, cowed and crushed by the weight of circumstance, and raise us into newness of life, so that the very scars of sin become purifying fires, and the crippling of circumstance becomes the means of God's enabling, and the wounds of sorrow become transfigured with a light which brings new beauty out just where the life was marred. Is it so strange after all? Is it so incredible? The genius of Michael Angelo can take a block of marble out of a scrap-heap, spoiled by a bungler and cast aside, and turn it into a masterpiece, working the very disfigurement into his design? Will the genius of God do less for men than that? His Spirit in nature will take the mists that fill the sky and shroud the world in a pall of gloom, and out of them produce the magic-tinted rainbow. Can the Spirit of life that kindled the light in the sky not kindle the light in the heart? Can He not take this nature of ours with all the stuff of daily toil and traffic, and make of it the medium of a finer life, a life spiritual, eternal, beautiful with the beauty of Christ, a life radiant with power and peace, springing from man's inner fount of being, where Christ is enthroned as Prince and welcomed as Saviour. It is this new life, Christ-governed and Christ-created, for which the world is looking to us to-day. The offer of this risen life is the message of the Christian gospel. "Whom men slew and hanged on a Cross, Him hath God raised from the dead and exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour."

In the second place there is a message of hope for the Church. There are many who have lost hope in the Church to-day. They see her distracted by divisions and overloaded with a mass of trivialities.

They see her crusted with convention, bound in habits of thought which were once a living creed, but now are grave-clothes about her body. They see her blind and deaf, as it seems to many, to the mightiest movements of our time, and impotent to speak the word of life to nations who war and classes who strive. And men are looking at the Church as the prophet of old looked at the valley of dry bones with this question whispering at their hearts: Can these bones live?

Now perhaps the picture of the Church's impotence is overdrawn—I believe it is. There is nothing so easy as criticism. The world has never understood how to judge the real life of the Spirit or where to look for the wind that bloweth where it listeth. Do not let any of us imagine that the Church is going to pieces, or that mankind will find some other centre of religious life. The Church is not a man-made institution. It is not the product of the club-instinct applied to religion. It is the product of the Spirit of God seeking and finding and fashioning a society of men and women, in whom His redeeming love could be more perfectly expressed for the saving of the world and the building of His Kingdom. How does the Church get her vitality? She gets it by the awaking to power of the Divine life in her in a kind of resurrection.

You remember what happened at Pentecost? Pentecost was the corresponding miracle in the Church, to that which happened when God raised Christ from the dead. It was a resurrection. The members had met together. They were poor, isolated, many of them weak in influence, impotent as it seemed against the world of their day. They had

to keep the doors shut with care for fear the surging mob would take it into their heads to crush the life out of them, as they had tried to crush it out of their Lord. And there came upon them, the Scripture says, the sound of a mighty rushing wind and, as it were, tongues of fire, and sat upon each of them; and they went out, miraculous personalities, to heal and preach, and compel the world by the sheer power of their witness to the acknowledgment of God in Christ. What was it that had happened? The Spirit which rose in Jesus had made of that humble company the vehicle of His life. The dominant note in their minds was an overwhelming and all-subduing consciousness of Christ as Lord, raising their whole nature to its highest level, in a response of victorious energies.

All that is possible again. It is the eternal possibility of such a God abroad in such a world as this. It is for that resurrection we are waiting. Meanwhile let us cast away all depressions and lift up hearts of hope. Let us take a new look at God, as He is revealed in the risen Christ, and the same response of faith will be awakened; for the faith which makes us mighty is no artificial creation of our own resolve. It is the natural response to the vision of God we see in the risen Jesus. Is *anything* too hard for such a Lord? Is it beyond the power of the Church to meet victoriously any evil however deeply entrenched, any crusade however stern, any task however big? Is anything beyond the resources of the Church for whom God lives in Christ, raised from the dead and exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour?

But can we not go even further and say that

there is a message here of hope for society, for the social order, in which man is bound to man and nation to nation? At present who shall describe the order of society as we see it at home and abroad? It is chaos. We think of Russia under the heel of a foul and monstrous tyranny worse than that of any Czar. We think of Central Europe, of other parts of the world, frenzied with a fever in the blood. We think of the unrest at home. What are we to make of it all? Is civilization going down into the dust of ancient barbarism? Is all this tract merely neutral to God,—this tract of our social and political and industrial life? Look back through history and what do you see? You see the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of life, seeking some means of expression like an artist seeking paint and canvas. You see Him make man out of the clay to bear His image. You see Him take a race of slaves and nurse them into freedom and independence that they might reveal His mind and will to the world. You see Him coming into the world in Christ, revealing Himself and His glory in that life and death. You see Him taking new form for His Spirit in the glorified body of the risen Christ. You see Him gathering the Church and kindling there the flame divine upon the altar of men's committed lives. Is it conceivable that it should all end there? Is it conceivable that the process should end before the whole social order in which man lives with man and nation with nation becomes a body for the Spirit of God? What does the Resurrection say to us looking on such a world as this? Does it not say that there is Power, power of infinite love and grace, able to enter this world and make it beautiful?

There is power of love and goodwill, power of truth and brotherhood, by which society may be lifted out of its frictions and hatreds and conflicts into the ways of righteousness and peace. When we are at the end of our own resources we are only at the beginning of our resources in Him, who was raised from the dead and exalted to become a Prince and a Saviour.

A Prince and a Saviour—that is what we need to-day. Let us dig deeper into our resources in Him. Let us begin afresh to explore the riches of our inheritance in the glorified Christ. A Prince and a Saviour! There is infinite meaning in that combination. He rules and He saves. His rule is salvation. He can only save us in the measure in which we accept His rule. His mastery is a redeeming bondage, in which we are delivered from all lower enslavements, to become our highest selves, in a love which makes us completely free. When Jacob Boehme the great mystic was dying, his ears were attuned to the harmonies of heaven. He seemed to be listening to a rapturous strain which filled his soul. "Open the windows," he cried with his last breath, "and let in more of that music." That is the word for us as the old world dies around us. Open the windows and let in more of that music —the music of the Easter hope. And let us give our souls to the rule of that Saviour and we shall see the Salvation of the Lord.

PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERING

"For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."—Heb. ii. 10.

ONE of the standing difficulties of the early Church was to reconcile the suffering of Christ and the glory of God. Wherever the early preachers went with their doctrine, they were met with the same taunt of derision. A suffering Messiah, a crucified God! The thing is impossible. It is a contradiction in terms. Who ever heard of such a ridiculous thing? The very idea of a cross was an affront to divinity. And even the Christians were tempted to feel that there was something shameful about the suffering of Jesus, like a point in the story of a great life where the hero has dipped down into degradation too deep for words. It was this way of thinking against which Paul flung his great protest when he shouted out that the one thing which he gloried in above all else, was just this dark and bloodstained Cross of Christ. It was this taunt which the early Church had to meet. At first it was very difficult. It is far easier to hold up one's head against a blow than to face a pointed finger of shame. The root of the trouble was, of course, their own wrong values. It was in their blood to look on suffering as some disgraceful thing, which carries a taint of evil or the brand of weakness.

Pain, for an orthodox Jew, was part of the curse of God. He could not get it out of his head that if a man suffered, it was because God was against him. And the writer to the Hebrews set to work to make them feel that the sufferings of Christ did not touch the honour of God. "By the grace of God," he said, "Christ tasted death for every man"; and then, as if he saw a look of surprise creeping over their faces and a lifting of the eyebrows at this coupling of the grace of God with the horror of Calvary, he went on, "For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

There are two things which he makes clear, with one sweep of his pen, about the sufferings of Christ. For one thing, they are quite consistent with the character of God. These loving hands of the Father, shaping the life of Jesus, guiding His course, made no mistake in the dark hour of His suffering. He knew what He was doing when He steered that soul of Jesus through those deep waters of His agony. "It became Him," says the writer. Nothing so expressed and set forth with becoming glory the nature of God, as the suffering of Christ. It was all in the main line of His purpose of love. Calvary was no side track, no mere bypath, into which Christ was driven by cruel circumstances which were too much for Him. In such a world as this, it was the high road of His great destiny; it was the true course of the Adventurous Love. God had a big task on hand. He was bringing many sons into glory, and nothing could achieve it but a Leader equipped through pain.

The shameful view of Christ's suffering still lingers. In Mr. Wells' portrait of his "Invisible King," which is only kingly in so far as it is borrowed from Jesus—he criticises Christ for what he calls His weakness, His policy of non-resistance. There he takes his stand with that multitude in the ancient and modern world to whom Christ is still "the great misunderstood."

It is difficult to realize that what we call Christ's humiliation was His glorification,—until our eyes have been opened. God's glory is in service. That is what God is—a Servant. He never escapes from suffering even on His throne. God's sacrifice is eternal; if the pain of it is lost, it is only lost by being overcome by a love in which it is swallowed up, as the big deep notes of an organ are lost by being taken up into the fuller and richer music of a noble theme. Christ suffered because it is God's nature to suffer. His suffering was a revelation of an agony which is part of the creative and redeeming love. If Christ had not suffered, there is something in God which would never have been known, because it would never have been uttered. Some of us have stood, perhaps, in a scientist's laboratory and seen him pass a pure beam of white light through the crystal which breaks it up into its many-coloured rays. Without that crystal to break it up, we would never have known the light was so radiant. The Cross of Christ is like that crystal prism. It breaks up the light of the uncreated love, and lets us see the myriad-coloured glory. But for the suffering of Christ we had never seen into the wonder of that love. Like the light, it is all about us, in trees and flowers, the majestic hills, and the smiling joys of every day. But beneath the smile of nature and the gifts of happiness,

there is a heart that breaks in pain, the heart of the Eternal Father. And in the suffering of Christ, it is isolated, like the great notes of the organ when the lighter strains are hushed.

In the second place Christ's suffering too was part of His training, His fashioning. It is something without which He could not have been Himself. It was necessary to His completeness of being. The Via Dolorosa was His only path to power. The words are strong—"To make Him perfect through suffering." There is a tendency of the mind, and it has always been there, to look at the spirit of Christ apart from life, as if He passed through the world in a kind of lofty independence, as an actor goes through the tragic incidents of a play without these incidents really shaping his being, or adding anything to his character. We miss the point of the life of Christ if we look upon Him as a ready-made Saviour, to whom life had nothing to give. The words are bold. "Christ was made perfect by His sufferings." They were an essential part of His development without which He could not have been what He was. Christ had to live His life as we live it; He had to find His way about amid its perplexities, as we find ours; He had to meet its temptations, as we fight ours. His nature had to be moulded and His powers awakened through the storm and the stress of life. Life was no sham fight for Jesus. It was a real battle in which everything was at stake and a real victory was won which changed the course of history. He was a living part of a living, struggling world on its way to God. "It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

One result immediately springs from this changed outlook on the sufferings of Christ. It is a changed outlook on our own. The moment we begin to see a glimmer of nobleness, of some great use of pain in His Cross and His Gethsemane, that moment we begin to see some great uses in our own. Suffering, when all is said and done, is the great problem of the universe. It is the one thing which, above all, perplexes and troubles the religious mind, for it is the religious mind that feels it most. When a man begins to think at all, he begins to question the why and wherefore. And there is no cut and dry answer ready to our hand. There is no theoretical solution to the problem. When all is said, the deepest truth lies still at the bottom of the well. But there is a practical solution, and that is the main point—for we are not here to understand, but to live. The practical solution is in Jesus. He lived this life of ours, faced and bore incalculable suffering, and still found life liveable; and what is more, the Scripture tells us that this suffering was an element in the making of His Divine manhood. Here is a life which is perfect, so redeeming in its power and quality, that there is not a single soul in all God's universe, however deeply bitten with shame and sin, whose poor heart cannot catch fire at the touch of Jesus and blaze out in a new splendour. Surely, if the Son of God had to suffer to become a perfect Saviour, if He met it with brave acceptance, like a soldier going into the battle for which he has enlisted, there must be meaning in our pain. There must be something noble in it, something enriching, something without which man could not be man, and God could not be God. Pain is more than the dross which we would fling away

and forget as soon as we can; it is the very mould, the very furnace without which the Potter's Hand could not fashion us into beauty. One look at the face of Jesus, lit up amid the shadows of Gethsemane by the passion which burns at His heart, will give you more insight into the meaning of pain than all the volumes that ever were written. He did not put it into words. He put it into a life. To look at the facts of pain apart from Christ, is like trying to catch the beauty of a piece of music by reading the manuscript: if you have not the musician's eye, it is nothing to you but a series of hieroglyphics, a set of stupid looking marks upon a paper. But hear a master play that music, translating it into melody through the medium of his own soul, then you begin to understand what glorious secrets of a hidden world are locked up in these crotchets and quavers. Mark Rutherford puts this point finely: "When we come near death or near something that may be worse, all exhortation, theory, promise, advice, dogma fail. The one staff which perhaps may not break under us, is the victory achieved in like circumstances by one who has preceded us, and the most desperate private experience cannot go beyond the garden of Gethsemane." If Christ suffered, shall there not be meaning in our pain? If God could only make Jesus perfect through suffering, is there any likelihood that He could do anything for us without it? There is tremendous comfort in this. "It behoved Him, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

Now this light which shines upon the world of pain from the suffering of Christ, does carry us a little way at least into the meaning of pain. It shows us, in

some degree, how sufferings do make for perfection. For one thing, the experience of suffering is a means of development. All the experience of life has this power of developing us, of bringing out of us some hidden quality. Life has a cutting edge about it in all its sharper experiences, which sets free some hidden beauty, some buried capacity, as a landslide which tears and wounds the surface of a smiling hillside may reveal a hidden stratum of gold. A man can no more become a man till life has dealt with him, than a daffodil can burst its sheath till it is put into the grip of the earth. And part of that experience is the experience of pain. There is something in us which only pain can bring out. Francis Thompson describes the making of a child's soul in heaven, with all its gifts and powers. But something was wanting at the end which only earth could give her—a tear. Wherever we may go on our long journey, there is something which only earth can give us to fit us for the larger life.

> Each wave that breaks upon the strand,
> How swift so e'er to spurn the sand
> And seek again the sea,
> Christ-like, within its lifted hand
> Must bear the stigma of the land
> For all eternity.

It is the stigma of earth, the wound-prints of pain, which, like the thorn-prints on Christ's brow and the nail marks of the crucifixion, bring out some richer beauty. Does it seem blasphemous to suggest that suffering developed Jesus? It is the suggestion of the Scripture. His suffering was real, and it played a real part in the awakening of His Saviourhood. How it set Him free! How it touched the

deep fountains of his compassion! How it awoke His tenderness! How it sent Him again and again to His knees to listen through the silence of eternity —brooding like the sky over a pain-racked world— for the interpreting voices of love. You cannot see Jesus until you see Him against the background of life's experience: and you cannot see Him till you see Him most of all against the lurid background of his Agony. Suffering has the power to soften hardness, to awaken courage, to bring a tenderness into proud faces which nothing else can put there. There are flowers that grow best in the shadowed places, and these are the flowers with the most delicate tints and fragrance. It is no glorification of pain to say these things or think these things. Physical pain we may get rid of, bit by bit, in part at least; though it is difficult to see how a man can honourably play his part in such a world as this without some cost to his body. Make a universe as smooth and placid as some lotus-land, and there will be fine natures who will break out of it and fling themselves away on some adventurous quest through the sheer need of living dangerously. I cannot imagine a world more near the brink of war and bloodshed, than a world that we have made so smooth and easy and prosperous that we revolt against it. Something is wrong with progress if it does not bring more pain instead of less—the pain of souls more sensitive to sin and sorrow. And by that pain we grow. "It became Him to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through sufferings."

But again, the perfection of Christ was in His oneness with all men, His sympathy with all men, through which He found the power to save. A man is not really growing whose heart is not expanding in

sympathy with others. The great qualities of the soul are those that link us with all mankind. As we rise out of ourselves in devotion to others, we grow. And by suffering, Christ grew into a deeper sense of unity with all mankind, a unity which was the power of His Saviourhood; till His heart became a kind of whispering gallery in which the low murmur of the world's agony cried aloud to God. He gathered up into Himself the world's suffering and bore it; and by that burden He became the perfect Saviour.

> Give me no counsel
> Nor let no comforter delight mine ear
> But such a one, whose wrongs do suit with mine,
> And I, of him, will gather patience.

People have often puzzled over the problem why the innocent should have to suffer for the sins of the guilty, and why it is that the pains of suffering are so badly distributed. In protest against this, the doctrine of Karma has come into existence, whereby the suffering of each is explained as the result of something he himself has done in a former life, so that each man's suffering is proportioned to his guilt. If there is a doctrine more devastating to the mind of man in the face of pain, I do not know it. It shuts men up in the isolation of their own souls. It turns a man's place of suffering into a prison, from which he has to burrow his way alone. It breaks humanity up into self-existent units, so that we are no longer a family, suffering together and proud to suffer together, proud if our suffering can help to lift our brothers' weight of pain. Humanity is one. We are members one of another. We are not ourselves till the tendrils of our sympathy have gone out and twined themselves about other lives and we stand

knit together for good or ill. It is this power of suffering with others, and thereby in our measure redeeming others, that pain brings to our door. Without this, Christ could not have been a Saviour. "It became Him to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through sufferings."

Now how does this view of things help us? We may say to ourselves, perhaps, that Christ stood alone. Suffering was all very well for such as He, with a great redeeming task; that was, so to speak, His business. He needed the character which suffering could give, and most of all the power to save. But as for us, something less will serve. The answer to all this is in a word. We are not saved till we are made like Christ, and this likeness to Christ carries all through. It means likeness to Him not only in the virtues of His private life; we must be like Him in the qualities which suffering made perfect, and most of all, in the quality of saving sympathy by which we bear in our lives the burden of others' sin and shame and suffering. The difficulty many people have in being reconciled to suffering is their unwillingness to be made like what God would make them, which is like Jesus. That is the crux of the whole matter. Do we want to be made like Jesus? Or have we some ideal of our own —some rose-coloured vision of ease or comfort which pain is shattering to fragments? The secret of being reconciled to pain, is being reconciled to God's ideal of life in Jesus. Some people are perilously near the old Roman Church fallacy of two orders of Christian conduct, one of which is for the man in the street, the other for the man in the cloister. There is only one order of saved men. It is the order of love; into

which a man is brought by Christ; and that is an order in which he becomes a saviour of others, and his own sufferings awaken in him redeeming quality and power. That is the only way in which we can be saved out of our own suffering. We are not saved till we are saved from self-pity, and find our joy in helping others. And we find that deliverance from our own pain in a great alliance with the loving purpose of Christ. He is the Leader of our salvation. What does that mean? It means that He comes down into our place of pain and wretchedness to lead us out of it by the way of fellowship with Him. There is no escape from suffering except by the way of a great love and a great vision of the will of God, whereby our suffering becomes redeeming, and the pain is swallowed up in the passion to be and to do what God would have us.

Our salvation depends on our fellowship with Christ. Our victory depends on our sharing the spirit and the attitude of Christ. One of the Arctic explorers tells in his book how he took part in the hard work of the party, pulling the sledges with the men, suffering with them in all their labours. He talks about the "sympathy of the traces." He describes how the depression, or lethargy, or pain of his men communicated itself to him as he and they held the same cords and toiled bit by bit over the snow and ice. And on the other hand, his courage and faith and hope were transmitted to them through the same sympathy of the traces, so that they were able to carry on. There is no solution for the problem of suffering, except in so far as we let Christ share our burden, by giving ourselves to His task.

To the man who is out for himself or for pleasure,

pain is a horror unrelieved, a disaster, a blot upon the universe, and there is no escape from it except by chloroform of one kind or another. But take the attitude of Christ, put your hand to His task, get close to Him. See life with His eyes, join yourself to His party, and you will feel the subtle sympathy of the traces, the strange thrill of joy and hope and peace. "Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

THE INCOMPLETE VIRTUE OF RESIGNATION

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."—Matt. vi. 10.

No petition in the Lord's Prayer is so frequently used, and none so frequently misused. This was a petition which was often found on the lips of Jesus. It served Him as the one clear utterance of His need in the hour of His sternest crisis, the hour He spent in Gethsemane. "Thy will be done" is the word that echoes through the solemn stillness of the garden of shadows. "Nevertheless not My will, but Thine be done."

Yet there is no prayer so frequently misinterpreted as this. It is generally associated in our minds with something harsh and forbidding, something which throws over our life the shadow of a cross. When we take this prayer and set it to music, as we do in several of our hymns, it is generally set to a dirge in a minor key, which lowers the temperature of our soul to freezing-point and brings a kind of chill to the heart. The situations to which we apply it, are generally those which have the tinge and colour of Gethsemane.

My God and Father while I stray,
Far from my home, on life's rough way,
Oh teach me from my heart to say,
"Thy will be done."

Is this a true picture of the will of God? Is this the right kind of suggestion to gather round the will of God—that will which is love, which breathes in the beauty of the earth and shines in the sunlight of the heavens, and smiles to us in the love of little children and the face of Jesus Christ? Was it really a sombre thing which Christ had in His mind, when He taught us to pray "Thy will be done"?

When we use this prayer, what is the attitude we too often put into it? Is it not merely a kind of pious resignation to a dark fate which we cannot avert? A calamity comes to us. It may be our health is broken, or we meet some staggering loss, or in some way our plans are crossed, and we try to submit to it without too much complaining and conclude that that is the fitting time to pray "Thy will be done."

Now, is this right? Was Christ merely commending here a spirit of resignation? Was He merely commending here a kind of baptized fatalism, a stoical patience with adversity, in the name of the will of God. Is there not something braver in this prayer, something bigger, something we can see and desire and consecrate ourselves to, with all our hearts, when life is sunny as when it is dark?

There are two things which this resignation idea forgets. The first is that God is not the author of many of the things which we are accustomed to call the will of God. Are we going to make God responsible, for instance, for all the sickness and the sorrow that darkens our life and say of it, "It is the will of God"? Is God responsible for the East End of London? Is God the author of our poverty-stricken, drink-polluted slums? Is God responsible

for the war through which we have just passed, with all its heart-breaking sorrows and shattered lives? Is God responsible for plagues which mow down their thousands, or for the sickness and starvation which are desolating so much of Europe? Is God responsible for the sins which cripple bodies and souls round our doors, and send their poisonous currents of disease and weakness through the lives of men and women to the third and fourth generation? Are we going to say that these things are the will of God? It is these which are the root causes of many of the hard circumstances and conditions in which men live their lives to-day. Can these be the will of God? If it were so, is He a God we could worship? If this were His will, is this a will we could bow down to without losing our self-respect and the best qualities of our soul? Is this the kind of thing which Christ had in His mind when He bade us pray, "Thy will be done"?

I have taken exaggerated examples of the kind of thing I mean, but the same problem arises in the smallest ill of life—even a cut finger! How are we to regard these things, and what cause are we to assign to them? That is the mystery of mysteries. It goes right down into the problem of evil, into which we can see only a little way. But no man whose life has been touched by calamity dare make God responsible for it, without landing himself in a hopeless problem, and without doing an injury to his own vision of God. Whatever brought evil into our life, it is not of God's sending; it is not of God's willing; it is rather the breaking of God's plan. Our hard conditions are the best He could do for us in a world such as man has made it. The difficult lot in which men find themselves is the result of His

will baffled and spoiled by the conflicting passion and selfishness of men. It is not God's original will —His divine decree. That would be to turn Him into a monster, and His world into a kind of witches' cauldron.

The second thing this resignation idea forgets is, that the will of God is something we have to do. It is not something which is done in spite of us. God's will is only done as we help Him to do it. That is the wonder of our life, that we are given a place in the accomplishment of this will of God. If God's will were a divine decree by which everything is fixed, there would be no sense in praying "Thy will be done." It would be done in spite of us, and there would be little use in praying for resignation, for it could matter little in the long result whether we were resigned or no. God's will is something we must *do*. It is something in which we have to play our part—a voice we have to hear and obey—a purpose we have to see and carry out—a plan we have to approve and work upon—a line of active love we have to grasp, and link up our lives with it. "God mend all," said the workman in Carlyle's story to his master, looking at the ruin of his country. "Nay, but we must help Him to mend it," was the answer. That is what Christ means. He means more than "God mend all"; he means "but we must help Him." It is a prayer to see the will of God in every circumstance of life, and seeing it, to have strength to do it. This active loyal consecration to the will of God is what the prayer demands. "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

Now, what is the will of God? What is the active purpose which lies at the foundation of the world?

What is the thing God is seeking in and through our lives, and seeking our help to carry out? There is only one word that can express it—the Word that "was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Christ is the light in which the mind and will of God become clear. In Christ, God's hidden purpose for your life and mine breaks out of its ancient obscurity, like a secret stratum of gold which emerges at the surface of the hill. Whatever our life may be, God's will for us is to make us like Jesus. That is the model, so to speak, on which every human life is based. That is the final goal to which the race of humanity is tending. That is the passionate hope for every one of us, which sleeps in the breast of God—the hidden dream in the Artist's heart, which sets Him toiling day and night to bring it to birth in a masterpiece. God's will is to make us like Jesus. Never lose sight of that for a moment, through whatever hard way life may be leading you. His will is to make you like Christ, to bring forth in you, cleansed and redeemed by grace, "the peaceable fruits of righteousness."

And look again, what is the larger purpose for which Christ strove—the purpose which was the driving power of his life by day and by night, so that He was never for a moment out of harness? Was it not the redeeming of the world, of the whole world, to make the lives of men beautiful and strong and true, and bind them together in love and loyalty till they become a kingdom of God, and the world their Father's house. Watch Him as He goes here and there, healing the sick, driving out devils of lust, speaking a cheering word to some downhearted soul, taking men and women and remaking them, and

breathing into them the breath of love which is the breath of life. That was the will of God taking shape. That was the will of God being done. Tell me, can you see this will of God without loving it, without desiring it, without your whole being going out towards it as the real ambition of life! Can you see anything greater in life or any greater way of looking at life, than just to realize that you have some part to play in this great purpose, some contribution to make to it, that your life may be built up into it, as the coral polyp builds up its little body, out of the shifting waters round it, into the solid rock on which the waves and storms shall beat and break in vain? It is this ambition which Christ puts into our heart, and bids us make the prayer of our life, "Thy will be done in earth."

Now, what is the attitude to life in its various aspects which this seeking of God's will demands?

In the first place, there is the attitude of brave acceptance of life's inevitable hardships and sorrows as the condition in which we have to seek the will of God. Notice what this means. It means something more than resignation to a lot we cannot avoid, though it be hard to bear. A sorrow comes to us, and we say, "We must resign ourselves to it as the will of God," and we submit with as good grace as we can to the altered circumstance and the lonely days, and crush as far as we can, the rebellious will and the complaining spirit, and try to say, "Thy will be done." This resignation has come to be looked upon as one of the great Christian virtues. But is this resignation all that the will of God demands in such a situation? And is this resignation such a beautiful Christian grace as we imagine it to be,

when it is *only* resignation. Listen to what R. L. Stevenson says about resignation. He is talking about the garden of the soul, and the various plants which are to be cherished there. "There is a plant called winter green, or Resignation, otherwise known as the False Gratitude plant. It is a showy plant, but leaves little margin for profit. John, do you see that bed of Resignation? I will not have it in my garden! It flatters not the eye and comforts not the heart. Root it out—out with it! And in its place put a bush of Flowering Piety, but see it be of the flowering sort." What is wrong with resignation is, that it does not go far enough. It does not flower, it does not blossom. It is more than resignation that is demanded. It is acceptance of the hard circumstances and the sorrowful way, if these be our portion, as the conditions in which we are to find and to do the will of God. But the conditions themselves are not the full will of God. They are only the terms on which we are to live out the life God would have us live, and play our part in the loving purpose of God, which is salvation for us and for all the world. Not merely to bow our head to the sorrow, but to seek to shape our lives in that sorrow, so that we shall do the will of God and show forth that courage and faith and loving-heartedness which are the nature of Jesus. Not merely to resign ourselves to walk a lonely way or carry a difficult cross, but walking that way and carrying that cross, to find our place in the service of God and fill it to the full—*that* is to do the will of God. The soldier is sent by his general to a difficult place in the line, or forced to hold a lonely post by the strategy of the enemy. What is his mood? It is not resignation

as if his whole duty were to submit to these conditions and refrain from complaining. His duty is more than that. It is to fight the foe, to carry out his orders, to take his share in the campaign. So it is with us. It is the soldier spirit of alert and vigorous loyalty that is demanded, not the barren mood of a passive resignation. The conditions may be part of God's will, the very best He could devise. Or they may have been forced upon us through some cross-current of sin or circumstance. But our assurance is that therein the will of God may be done. In them we may find some way of living the life to which Christ calls us. There we may find some way of aiding the purpose of God. It is this mind we seek, this active mind and passion for what God means to make of us and through us. "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

Then again, it is a prayer for the discernment of God's will in the perplexing decisions and hard choices of life. The faith with which the Bible starts in bringing us near to God, is the faith that every man's life is a plan of God. To every man, as some one puts it, there is given "a definite and peculiar confidence of God." If we were in close enough touch with Him, His Spirit would guide us so that at any perplexing moment we would find a directing finger and a voice would say to us in some unmistakable conviction, "This is the way, walk ye in it." That way for us would be the will of God. This prayer is a prayer for grace to see our way, day by day, clear cut in the light of God, so that in taking that way, we are fulfilling His purpose of God for us and getting His will done on the earth.

There are many means by which the Spirit guides

us in these perplexing ways. There is the guidance of an inward discernment, a fineness and delicacy of perception which some people have above others. They seem to know what is right as by a sort of instinct. Every man who is in touch with God will be Spirit-led. He will come to feel at certain moments of life a pressure upon his soul, or a shadow falling upon his way, which turns him to this side or that. Or it may come in what we may call the guidance of circumstances. How often it has happened in a man's life that the great choices were in a way taken out of his hands, and that he was led on from point to point, by the directing hand of circumstances! It may be objected that the guidance of circumstance is often misleading. So it is. Circumstances are like everything else in life. They take their colour from our own minds. A certain event may say one thing to one man, and another thing to another. But we must bring the right mind to the circumstances. God will not lead us without the use of our own minds. We must apply our own thought to the situation and use the judgment of our own reason. God trains us by forcing us to choose and see our path step by step—even at the risk of mistakes. The great thing is to get into the right attitude of mind, and in that attitude think things out. And the right mind is the mind that seeks only the will of God, the mind that is alert for opportunity, because it is lit with the passion to do the will of God. In a great speech which Abraham Lincoln delivered just before his assassination, he has a word on this matter. He is looking back on four tremendous years full of crisis, which might have made any man afraid. And now at last he has come safely

through. "I have not controlled events," he says. "I would rather say that events have controlled me. But I have met them all with this faith"—the faith, that is to say, in high ideals and dependence on the help of God. No one looking at these events would have said that events had controlled Lincoln. Again and again he seemed to take a line that was totally against the clear pointing of circumstance, and his own Cabinet was often opposed to him. But here is the point. He brought a faith and a passion to events which lit them up and gave them a guiding message. He sought the will of God for his nation and his time, and in the cross-currents and tides of things he found the path mapped out. That is what we need and what we pray for—a mind to see the will of God in our daily life, so that events shall guide us aright, and from day to day we shall do the thing which is the will of God for us in our situation. "Thy will be done in earth, as it is done in heaven."

Further, it means a spirit of battle and service amid the ills of life and the needs of others. Many of the ills of life have no right to bring us resignation. They should bring into our soul the spirit of rebellion. If God permits them at all, it is for this one reaction upon our souls, to rouse us to a crusade which will sweep them right away as having no proper place in God's universe. This is true of many of the ills of our own life. We have no business to endure them. There is a good deal of ill health, for instance, to which we have no right to resign ourselves. No man has any right to be resigned to ignorance, who has time on his hands and books at his elbow. There is an apathy which is the sin of sins, because it foils God's passion of self-giving. Above all, we

dare not be resigned to any sin or vicious habit which stains our own life. In a recent novel there is the story of a girl, whose early years were spoiled by a vicious temper in her blood which rose and swept over her in gusts of passion. In vain she tried to fight it, and her disappointment began to settle down in a kind of fatal resignation of despair. At last a friend, brooding on her trouble, found the secret, and put his finger on the root. "The mistake you make," he said to her, "is this. You accept the imperfect as a penalty, instead of claiming the perfect as a birthright." How many of us make that mistake! God's perfect Will is our purity and victory. That Will is our birthright in Jesus. It is our part to claim it through the sufficiency of His grace. To see it in Him and claim it as our right, is the first step out of bondage into victorious freedom.

If it is so with ourselves, it is abundantly so with regard to others. A man may be resigned to the ills of his own life. No man has any business to be resigned to the ills of others, so far as he can help to prevent them or cure them. The idea that there are certain curses which are in the nature of things—that there will always be war, or there will always be poverty, or there will always be vice—is standing in the way of the kingdom of God to-day, because it is paralysing the hands of people who might help, if only they did not lay this anodyne of false resignation to their souls, when the bitter need of the world comes challenging by. The suggestion is that these things are so, because they have been made so, because they are in some way the will of God. But are these things the will of God? Surely not! Was it not against these things that Christ set the whole

current of His being in an offensive of love which brought Him to a Cross? What does the Cross mean if it does not mean God's indestructible hope for humanity. His will of love is so precious a thing, that Christ was willing to die to make it visible, and to keep it alive in the earth before the eyes of men. Are we to be content with the world as it is, in the name of the will of God?

> Shall crime bring crime for ever—
> Strength aiding still the strong;
> Is it Thy will, O Father,
> That man should toil for wrong?
> No! say Thy mountains. No! Thy skies.
> Man's clouded sun shall brightly rise,
> And songs ascend instead of sighs.

That is the note this prayer demands—the note of battle that challenges every wrong, the note of service which seeks every healing and redeeming way. Every scientist who is rooting out disease is doing the will of God. Every man who is seeking to make life sweeter and better, is doing the will of God. Every philanthropist who is trying to assuage the tide of human misery, every politician who seeks to bring in better conditions of life for the people, is doing the will of God. This is a fighting prayer. It is a worker's prayer. It is the prayer of the eager heart, longing for a world in which dwelleth righteousness. "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

What does "in heaven" suggest? Who shall say? But the heart of it is the spirit to do God's will for the love of it. It means the obedience which comes from the free choice of the heart. God will have no conscripts in His army, but the self-made conscripts of love. To do the will of God on earth

as in heaven means so loving it, that it will become the very choice and desire of our hearts, the very inspiration of our lives. "Thy statutes are become my songs in the house of my pilgrimage." The songs in which we sing of the will of God, should be the most cheerful songs in our books of praise. The will of God will never be done, till we see it as Jesus saw it—as the one glorious ambition and purpose of life. The will of God must become a battle-cry and a marching song. By such triumphant loyalty the Kingdom will be brought in and the King come to His own.

THE KEY TO EXPERIENCE

"And when they were come, and had gathered the Church together, they rehearsed what great things[1] the Lord had done for them."—Acts xiv. 27.

IT is a great day, when a man who has been away on some expedition, gathers his friends round him to tell his story. You can tell a good deal about a man's character by the kind of description he gives of such experiences. If a man comes back from a foreign tour, for instance, and speaks of nothing but the quality of the hotels he lived in, you know where to place him at once. Some will tell only of their losses, or their discomforts, or the ills they suffered upon the journey. Some, on the other hand, will describe the beautiful things they saw, the kindnesses that were done to them, and so reveal a vivid interest in God's world and a nature on the outlook for the best. In any case nothing reveals a man so much as the kind of record he keeps in his mind of the experiences of life, no matter how life may have treated him. And nothing better illustrates the kind of man Paul was than this word which describes his account of his first journey as a missionary of Christ. He and Barnabas had been sent away from Antioch some months before, to be pioneers of the gospel in distant

[1] Phrase translated as in Gospels.

and dangerous places, and break new ground for Christ. When they came back from that journey they gathered the Church together and rehearsed, "what great things the Lord had done for them."

This is one of those revealing flashes which light up a man's soul. For if you read the account of the journey you will see that Paul might have laid emphasis on a good many other things. It had not been all milk and honey. They had had many trying times. Again and again the fury of a great mob was let loose against them, and they had been driven out of one city after another. There must have been a good deal of hunger and thirst to bear They had doubtless had many a very uncomfortable night. They were often footsore and weary and met with many a cold reception. To crown everything, the people of Lystra stoned Paul, and hurt him so badly, with intent to kill him, that he was drawn for dead out of the city. Many a man could have made quite a doleful tale out of it all, and at least given such a recital of his troubles as would have left the impression that he was something of a hero or a martyr, or both. But that was not Paul's way. When they had done sketching their story, it is the face of *God* that shines out of the picture. God's love and care were uppermost in their minds, and lit the thorny road they had been walking with lamps of gold. They forgot all the hardships and the weariness in one splendid and glowing memory of the great things which God had done for them.

Does not this hold a message for us in the interpretation of life, and in the outlook we ought to have upon our past and our present experience? How do we sum up our day, looking back upon it as we do

sometimes of an evening when the lights are low, and the noises of the day are hushed? We can tell a good deal about ourselves from the summary we make of our experiences. How do we sum up our activities as a Church, for instance, when we look back on the past year? What kind of experiences do we lay stress on? You can tell a good deal about a congregation from reading a Church report if you read between the lines, often far more than the writers meant to say. You can tell what kind of people they are from the things on which they lay stress in the experience of congregational life, whether they are spiritual or unspiritual, whether they are puffed up with outward prosperity, or shining with the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Here, in Paul's report of what had happened on his journey, we have a lesson on the right stressing of life, the right emphasis of life. Does it not suggest to us that if a man have the right spirit, no matter what his experiences have been, there will be something good to tell about life, something encouraging, something hopeful, something to raise a song about, even though it be from a prison, even though it be a song in the night, and in the darkest day some light be found if we will look for it? Does it not suggest that in the hardest and bitterest experience there are rays of hope, and gleams of the comfort and consolations of God? Some have been passing through the bitterest years of life, filled to the brim with anguish and corroding anxiety and wintry cares. As they look back it seems one long valley of unbroken shadow. But is that the last word? Is there no silver lining to the cloud, nothing to give a hint of God's care and God's consolations? Surely if we look again there is some-

thing too for which we can thank God, something which, if we once get hold of it, would keep back for a moment the flood of great waters, till we get our feet once more firmly planted upon the rock. Whatever life may have brought us through, there is always enough to thank God for. The care and love of God are never foiled or baffled through the accidents of nature or the malice of men or even by our own sins and blunders. Love always finds out a way into our life. The earth may be torn and blasted by battle; but the spirit of life is undefeated. It breaks out afresh, covering the torn and ghastly earth with flowers. Milton may lose his eyesight; but the love that made him, works inward, giving him keener vision of things unseen. Death may shadow our friendships; but love breaks out around us in a deeper sense of human sympathy, weaving other ties the stronger. Sin may blast our lives in one direction; but the Spirit of love draws near in cleansing shame and contrition and braces our hearts for a braver battle. There are always the divine compensations. There is always something left, even amid the ruins—through which God can speak to us, and give us back the light of His face. Stevenson tells of an old sailor's summary of life which he had, worked out in an emblem at each side—"An anchor—stands for hope—and in the middle the word 'Thankful.'" The eye which Christ has opened to life, and given the true perspective, sees only what makes us grateful, and only what bids us hope. Go to a sick bed yonder and you will find one sick unto death, worn and wan with pain. He may begin, if you ask him, by speaking of his trouble. But that will not be the last word. Suddenly the

key will change from the minor to the major. A new look will come into the eye and you are listening to a story of mercies, of inward joy, of fortunate things and happy incidents, interpreted by love as the workings of Providential grace. Matthew Arnold describes it, poet of melancholy though he was:—

> 'Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead
> Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green;
> And the pale weaver through his windows seen
> In Spitalfields, looked thrice dispirited.
>
> I met a preacher there I knew, and said,
> "Ill and o'er worked, how fare you in this scene?"
> "Bravely," he said, "for I of late have been
> Much cheered by thoughts of Christ, the living Bread."

That is always the last word for Paul and those who have seen Christ Jesus. "Troubled on every side, but not distressed. Perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, as dying and behold we live, sorrowful yet always rejoicing." That is the last word, the conquering word. Even so they came back out of many hardships, and "rehearsed what great things God had done for them."

Now this brings us to the point of the whole matter. What is it that gives a man like Paul this kind of optimism and gladness, so that he is always able to pick out the best, and always able in the darkest day to see some gleam of light from heaven itself? It did not mean that his nature was so constituted that he was impervious to trouble. There are some people like that. They are like the sundial with the legend, "I mark only the sunny hours." In a sense that is a good thing to do. It is the very thing I have been arguing for, if we mean by it the

faculty for keeping alive in our mind the good and gracious things of life, and making no record of its darker days to hold it up against the universe. But if marking only the sunny hours means that our soul is so callous, so hard, that it has lost the capacity to feel the pain of life, and especially the pain of others, then we have lost the capacity for life's richest, sweetest, and profoundest experiences, the joy, which, as George Eliot says, is "so like pain that we can only tell it from pain by its being what our souls desire above everything else, because we know that it is good." The deepest joys of life are not found by running away from its painful facts, or shutting out discomfort and hardship. The author of *De Profundis* traces his fall to the fact that he always chose the sunny side of the street and made a fine art of cultivating pleasure. The deepest joy is a by-product of the life that loses itself seeking and serving God in everything. Shunning life and screening ourselves from its ills, we lose, indeed, the capacity to be taught of God; for a soul that is rich in feeling is a sensitive instrument which catches the finer accents of His message. It was not because Paul did not feel "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" that he said nothing about them, and only "rehearsed what great things God had done for him." It was because he had caught and held to his heart God's gracious purpose and made that his own. He had seen that purpose working in two directions, both in him and through him — in him for himself and through him for the world. He had seen that purpose in Jesus, and to his Christ-illumined mind the world had become the sphere of God's creative and redeeming action. With that new vision in his heart, he

had gone out into the world to watch it working through everything, and to ally himself and all his powers of faith and courage and self-sacrifice with its operations. The man who will do that finds himself living in a transformed world. The whole universe of experience, rough or smooth, storm or sunshine, life or death, becomes a mighty conspiracy of the Divine Love.

Let us try for a moment or two to look with Paul's eyes as he so interpreted his experience, that it seemed full of the great things of God. First, let us see that the great things God does for us are what He does *in* us. The purpose of God in the world is neither our happiness nor our comfort, but our character. We are here that God may make something of us as moral and spiritual beings. Paul had that fixed deep in his soul. He was here on this earth not for what he could make or enjoy or win from the point of view of material success, but for what Christ could make of him. The moment he had that truth fixed in his soul, accepting it and consenting to it with all his being, a great change came over the face of experience. Many things lost their significance at once. They simply did not matter. A few stones falling on his body here or there, did not matter. A few nights' sleep lost, did not matter. What the Jews said about him by way of relieving their minds, did not matter. The thing that *did* matter was how he bore himself when these things were going on. Did he keep a brave heart or did he play the coward when they stoned him? Did he keep his temper sweet and gentle or give way to a bitter and revengeful mood when they flung their jibes at him? Did he stand true amid everything,

true to his faith, true to the little company who had chosen him to go and who were praying for him away back yonder in Antioch? That was the thing that mattered! And if his courage rose and his faith grew clearer and sweeter, as it did, what was the explanation? Surely it was God's doing, God's way of giving, blessing, enriching, strengthening with His inward grace. It was just God doing great things for him, working into his soul shining strands of patience and courage and Christian manliness, and working out of it by that same process all taint of pride and self-satisfaction and every sort of subtle selfishness which might have made him of less use to God and men. It was these works of redeeming love which God was doing in him, of which Paul was thinking. Not that he was a prig or a sentimentalist, counting virtues and registering feelings. But surely there is something wholly right and pardonable in any man who wants to be of some use to God, rejoicing to see one dark thing after another losing its grip and slackening its pursuit, as he keeps himself in the shadow of the Cross—if, as Paul did, he give the glory to God. Is not this the right way of judging life's experiences? The great things God does for us are not the things He does outside of us — His providential guidance, deliverances from danger and the like, the gifts that life is always bringing to us so wonderfully. The great things God does for us are done within us, in the effect of these experiences upon our natures. Do our experiences pass within to do the work which God's Spirit can enable them to do, leaving us when they have gone with some new grace of courage, some larger vision of God, some deeper sympathy with

man, some surer mastery of life? Or do they only pass us by, recording in our memories the fact that they have come to us, just as a passing tripper would scrawl his name upon a wayside rock? The test of what we are getting out of life is its reaction upon our souls. An old man once said to a youth setting out upon the road, "Remember, life will either soften your heart or it will harden it, or else it will break it." There is much truth in this discernment; and every kind of experience has this varied power. The question of life's success is not what we have made of it, but what it has made of us! What kind of men and women have we become in the contact with life? What kind of souls have we developed through the stress and strain? Are our natures being deepened, our hearts being softened, our minds growing clearer about the great things, our spirits entering more deeply into the living peace of Christ? Is the vision of Christ growing finer and more radiant year by year, as the face of Beatrice became to Dante, the higher he ascended toward Paradise? Is the increasing experience of life revealing to us ever some new aspect of the everlasting love? Listen! "Then were the disciples filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost." Do we know anything of that experience—the joy of God's presence, the power and freedom of the soul which is increasingly God-controlled and God-possessed? These are the great experiences, the enduring experiences, beside which the things that merely touch our outward life are but débris, of no more real and lasting value than the trifles we bring back from a foreign tour to keep in our cupboards for mementoes of the past. The great things of life are the abiding influences

wrought into our nature by the gracious discipline of God. It was these fruits of experience which were in Paul's mind when "he rehearsed the great things God had done for them."

But again, Paul recognized that the great things of life are the things which God does *through* us. No doubt it was upon these he dwelt even more than the other, how the cripple was healed, and the devils were driven out, and the light of the Gospel message kindled the flame of faith and love in every town he had visited. It is a great story, which thrills us even now as we read it. Is there any greater thing God can do for a man than to make him the channel of inspiration and the instrument of help and healing to the world about him? There is a phrase used in the business world to describe men whose work is of vital importance to several branches of an industry. They are called "pivotal" men. That was Paul's position. He was a pivotal man upon whose influence and faith the conversion of hundreds revolved, and a whole race of men and women swung into the light of faith and hope. Now that is the position in which every Christian man stands to his fellows in some degree. He is a vital point in the line of God's communications with the world around him. He is a vital link in the chain of God's redeeming purpose. Others are depending on him for the right attitude to life. Others are swinging into the line of God's grace upon the pivot of his influence, consciously or unconsciously. Is there any greater thing God can do for any man than to make him capable of such a post? Do you remember the noble plea which Jeanie Deans, in *The Heart of Midlothian*, made to the

Queen after that long journey south to beg for her sister's pardon? "When the hour of trouble comes to the mind or the body, and when the hour of death comes, that comes to high and low, then it isna what we hae dune for oursells, but what we hae dune for others, that we think on maist pleasantly." It is these acts of blessing which in any true valuation of life are "the great things God has done for us."

Now if this be so, will it not cast a new light upon many of the darker experiences of life—the waste places of sorrow or pain—and make them blossom as the rose? Would it not reconcile us to much that is very bitter, if we could see in it God's method of equipping us for this task of blessing, and setting us in the place where we could be most useful? Is not the place of pain in which God sets us with others, a whispering gallery in which every syllable of courage or faith may become vibrant with inspiration and find a ready audience? Is not the furnace of suffering God's method of shaping us to the higher uses of His grace,

> As iron dug from central gloom
> And heated hot with burning fears,
> And dipt in baths of hissing tears,
> And battered with the shocks of doom
> To shape and use?

Does not our pain take on a new meaning when we see in it God's opportunity of revealing to our souls that grace wherewith we may "comfort others with the comfort by which we are comforted of Him"? One of Peary's companions in Polar exploration referred to a year of incredible hardship and toil as "the greatest year of my life," because of some new

values which it had given to it. And surely if we learn to grasp the gracious purpose of God in Jesus, the time will come when we shall look back upon life's experience with a new interpretation, and measure it by the values of the Cross, and say, "The Lord hath done great things. The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad."

HOW GOD BRINGS MEN TO JUDGMENT

"When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness."—Isa. xxvi. 9.

THESE chapters, so far as we can gather, are part of a great cry which went up from the hearts of exiles. The date and circumstances of this prophecy are uncertain, but the language reflects the bitterness of a people, cultured and saintly, torn from their homes and held captive in some foreign land by the clutch of a ruthless tyrant. As Sir George Adam Smith points out, there are many notes in this cry. There is the note of poverty and suffering which had burnt itself into their blood. There is the note of penitence wrung from them by the sense that their own sin and disloyalty to God had helped to bring them where they were. But besides this, there is the longing which has always more or less arisen from the hearts of suffering men, the longing for an act of God which should redress the balance of this misguided world. Here is our enemy, ruthless, proud, and prosperous — that was the sting of it! When will he be brought to a sense of his wickedness? It is the common complaint of man baffled by the mystery of an ill-adjusted world! On the surface, goodness and evil seem to have no relation to material things. It often seems to make little difference how men live so far as their outward condition

is concerned. It would almost seem as if the way of righteousness were strewn with thorns, while the way of passion and selfishness is smooth-paved and easy.

If only God would break in and show His hand—that is the cry of this writer! If only He would intervene to smite those who are giving themselves to evil, people would begin to reach a respect for righteousness. How can people learn to do right so long as evil-doing seems to pay? Beneath all this, there is a faith to which somehow good men in their worst moods have always clung—the faith that at the bottom the plan of life is just and righteous, and some day there will be compensations. Men of faith have always believed that present distributions of good and ill are only temporary, and in that thought found peace. "The day is coming," the early Christians cried amid their torture. "Faith," says Tertullian, "is patience with the lamp lit." That light of faith and hope has given to the patience of persecuted saints its unconquerable quality. Some day God's judgments will appear and the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

Now in this craving for the visible judgments of God there is some confusion of mind. We have learnt from Christ since then, and have come to see that peace of mind is not dependent upon material reward. A Christian man's faith in goodness has nothing to do with the question whether goodness is outwardly successful or no.

> He that hath light within his own clear breast
> May sit i' the centre and enjoy bright day.
> But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts
> Benighted sits beneath the mid-day sun,
> Himself is his own dungeon.

The love of God is a Christian man's own reward, and in the darkest situation he has seen through Christ a light upon God's face which scatters his perplexities. It is righteous men, moreover, who make a righteous world, not any catastrophic intervention of God. The real problem is how to bring men to a sense of sin and awaken them to a love of righteousness which shall reflect itself in all their dealings with one another. The only judgment which will change things is the self-judgment of men who come to see their own hearts. How does God bring men to this self-judgment? that is the question. Is it true to say that His righteousness is never so reflected in life that men see it and repent? Is it true to say that God stands back all the time—the great neutral—not even intervening to see fair play? How does God bring men to judgment?

One answer is that men are judged in the long run by the reaction on their lives of the moral nature of things. The old picture of God seated on a throne dispensing rewards according to merit, like a judge in a Court of Law, is too mechanical for truth. God's real judgments are in the laws of life which have a moral basis. "Every day is a judgment day," says a writer. Every day we are being tested, sifted, settled into our own place by the way in which we deal with life—and it deals with us. Think of purity, for instance. The unclean thought reacts upon the body and sows the seeds of disease. Evil living brings physical disaster sooner or later. The most terrible disease known to medical science, the most prolific of trouble in all directions, comes through the dishonour of life's finest capacity. The garden of our deepest joy and happiness is guarded

by an angel with a flaming sword. People may say to themselves that there is no right and wrong—merely foolishness and wisdom. But sooner or later the broken law of purity works out its ghastly revenges.

Or take the laws which govern national vigour and prosperity. The page of history flames with the judgments of God. Nations that were once strong sink into the dust, and when you track the secret, it is some defiance of the laws of righteousness. When reverence dies, the heart of a nation fails. When purity and self-discipline go, a people is on the road to ruin. Out in the deserts of the East, vast monuments have been discovered, which speak of a strength and skill unsurpassed in history. We ask, as we look at them, what could have brought the men who made them down to the dust? How did the springs of such a mighty civilization come to dry up? The secret is some moral failure which spread like hidden disease upon a mighty tree, eating out its vitality, till a breath of wind which once would have made it sink its roots deeper into the earth, brought it to the ground, and its memory remains only in the splendid ruin of what once it was. The struggle of life in such a world as this, deals severely with any weakness, and the final power of survival in a critical hour depends on loyalty to the principles of righteousness.

Or think of the world to-day, seething with trouble, with much that is fine and noble falling into ruin. Who will deny that the world has come to this collapse because all the nations were more or less involved in a wrong way of international life, flouting the law of brotherhood through national timidity

and ambitions. The law of love which Christ revealed is no mere conception of a dreamer. It is the unveiling of the secret order of reality. There is no life in God's world for nations which find their pride in strength of armies, and power of fleets. The judgments of God have been written—for men who can read them—in flaming fires across the midnight skies, in mangled bodies and roofless homes, in cities cowering under the terror. It is mere blindness in the face of these things to say there is no open judgment, and that it does not matter how we live.

Or think of those deeper secrets of the soul in which life takes revenge upon the selfishly prosperous. What of the man who finds success at the expense of righteousness? Is he always happy? Is his soul always content? Is there always peace in his heart? How many successful people have a death's head at their table, a skeleton in the cupboard? Is the selfish man really at ease? Is the evil liver who may have escaped the physical penalties of sin never haunted by the memory of what he might have been, stealing like a ghost about his pillow? Mental specialists are familiar with cases where life has been poisoned at the roots by some moral disloyalty away back in the past, forgotten long ago, but still working out its deadly result in the fears and inward conflicts of an unbalanced mind. We have only to read the newspapers with imagination, to see behind the tragic stories of what we call "the broken conventions," the judgments of God.

The sinister thing in the world to-day is not the failure to apply the principles of Christ. We are faced with a far darker peril, the repudiation of Christ

altogether as the moral Master of the world. In many cases this creed of moral anarchy is no more than a screen against a secretly protesting conscience, but it is there. More than one of our novelists and playwriters is secretly sapping the foundations of society with ideas that turn men and women into "moral idiots." They play with the notion that if men and women are only sufficiently attracted to each other, that is enough to sanction any kind of breach of the moral law. But the great writers, forced by artistic sincerity, have to tell the truth, and the whole truth is, there is no real peace in any union which breaks the moral laws of life. Mr. H. G. Wells, in one of his pre-war books, tells the story of two people who broke with purity in order to live together. He makes what apology he can for sin, but in the end of the book, because he is true to his art, the truth comes out, and the end is tragedy. They are leaving London together; the woman bursts into tears; and over the man there sweeps the shadow of remorse. He feels that they are doing each other a deadly wrong. "Why had we done this injury to one another? Why?" They are sinning against the nature of things; and the nature of things, which is the nature of God, rises up against them in a depression and dispeace which turns the fancied paradise into a desert.

We may feel we have advanced a long way from the shadow of Mount Sinai with its stern negations, but Mount Sinai stands as one of the great judgment-seats of history. Its laws were no mere conventions of a little, obscure nation. They were the revelations of the basic constitution of man's being, which for that moment flamed into the light that he might see

his way and learn righteousness. Not for nothing did these commandments follow upon the great deliverance in which Israel found liberty. They were the inner authority of right without which their new-found liberty would have been a perilous gift. The outward mastery of Pharaoh was shaken off; but there would have been no real progress had the inner reverence not brought them into a diviner bondage. The commandments stand to-day completed in Christ and taken up into His great law of love,—but they stand. There is an old Spanish proverb, "God does not pay on a Saturday, but in the end He pays." Deep in our natures which were created by love, there are reverences we dare not flout. Behind the whole moral order there is the passion of a love that wills our freedom and our peace. Sooner or later, life pulls us up when we are on the wrong road, and the hand that smites, has in it a love that fears for our character, more than it fears for our comfort. "Whither shall I flee from Thy presence?" said the Psalmist. "If I make my bed in hell, Thou art there." What can he mean but this, that the terror and pain of a life gone wrong is a shadow of the Divine presence which will not let us go, loving us too deeply to let us escape the consequences of sin.

But some one may say, is there no unhappiness for those who take the right way, the way of righteousness? Does the higher road not often lead us into difficulties? Does conscience never take man into the desert? Does truth never demand its sacrifices? The New Testament is full of them; Christ warned His would-be followers that if they were true to Him they would certainly get into trouble. And what of

those who suffer for the sins of others, bearing in their very bodies the bitter fruit of others' sowing? It is a deep problem, but surely there is all the difference between the suffering of the man whose conscience is clean, and that of the man who knows that he stands condemned and responsible. There is a whole world between the pain of a Christian at the stake, and the torture and suffering of a man on the rack of a vicious body. In the one case there is a joy and peace which make the face shine amid the flames; in the other, a pain and anguish of the heart which put out the very light of heaven. By the reactions of life in the slow grinding mills of circumstance, God brings men judgment.

But there is a way far more direct than that. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ. When Christ came into the world, a judgment-seat was erected among mankind. One of the startling facts about Him was that His very life judged men. All kinds of people pass through these pages before Him, and every one stands judged, measured, and revealed by his attitude to Jesus. Every man is self-judged by the stand he takes with regard to Christ; and by that stand his character is shaped, and his destiny is set, even though his attitude be quite unconscious. Who was the judge when Christ stood before Pilate and the men who brought Him there for trial? What does history say about them to-day? It was *they* who were standing at God's bar that morning, lit up by their words and deeds and silence to the dimmest recesses of their souls. History has countersigned that judgment, not only in its opinion, but in its facts. Forty years later, the Temple about which they were so anxious was a

mass of ruins, and the majesty of Rome is "one with Nineveh and Tyre."

Christ is the mouthpiece of God's judgments to-day. He has raised a standard of values which has penetrated the atmosphere. By His light the Church judges the world, and the world judges the Church. There is no higher praise than to call a man "a real Christian." Whatever new standards may threaten the authority of Jesus, His is the last word upon moral questions. He judges the world because His light shows up the wrong things, and brings about their cleansing. Slavery died in the long run because Christ condemned it. Prison life was reformed because Christ's light shone into it. Our slums meet us to-day with haunting horror and rebuke because Christ in our hearts condemns them. Men feel the injustice of our social system because it conflicts with Christ's standard of human values. The horror of war is uppermost in our minds, amid all its devastation, because Christ has awakened the dream of brotherhood. "That pure light," says Alexander Smith in an essay on *Christmas*—"that pure light makes visible the darkness. The Sermon on the Mount makes the morality of the nations ghastly. The divine love makes human hate stand out in dark relief. If the Christian is less happy than the pagan, and at times he is so, it arises from the sting of his finer and more scrupulous conscience." The public opinion which Christ creates, is the one irresistible power which makes for justice and kindles the fire in the heart of every reformer which evil cannot put out. So God brings men to judgment.

But this raises a deeper point. Men do not learn righteousness till they are brought to that self-

judgment which the Bible calls the "conviction of sin." It is one thing for God to set up an external tribunal in the facts of life and the verdict of public opinion; it is another thing for a man to accept that judgment and bow his soul before it. It is one thing for a man to be convinced in his mind or body that sin does not pay; it is another thing for him to be convinced in his conscience that sin is wrong. Till that happens, all the suffering in the world will not make men learn righteousness. It is doubtful even whether men learn from their own suffering to any extent. Sometimes a man or a nation will read in the pain and anguish of disaster something which brings them to their knees. For the most part they only learn the expediency of right, which is a very different thing. The discomfort of suffering is a different thing from the horror of sin. The pain of a feeble body is a different thing from the anguish of an outraged conscience. The one may only make a clever strategist devising means to escape the vengeance of life, the other breaks a man down in sorrow and tears and brings him to the feet of God. The judgments of God have not taught a man righteousness, till he has fallen on his knees with the cry, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight." And it takes more than his own suffering to do that.

What is the power by which God brings His self-judgment home? It is the Cross. Christ's judgment-bar is not the accusing splendour of His life, though that comes home to us when we are honest with ourselves. The final judgment-bar whose verdict is irresistible is Calvary, where God suffered all the reactions of sin. Calvary was the

place where justice seemed to reach its climax of outrage; but Calvary has become the judgment-throne. For what does Calvary say to us when we go there with an open mind? We cannot put into words what Christ put into a Cross, but *there* the selfishness and sin of the hearts of men came to fruit like a tree in full autumn, and in that broken body of the Son of God, forced to take a criminal's place, there is a vision of sin which can pierce the hardest heart. Men often use soft words about sin. They belittle it, cover it over with webs of self-excusing, which betray the secret protest of an uneasy conscience; but in the Cross and all it meant for Jesus, the camouflage is torn away. Sin is that dark and tragic thing in the human heart which put Christ to death. They were not specially bad men who crucified Jesus. They were just like ourselves; but such as they were, their sin and selfishness and wilful blindness to the light of truth, combined to make the kind of world in which the Son of God could not live. We cannot track out the motive, and ambitions, both individual and national which issued in the crucifixion of Christ, without feeling a shuddering sense that the taint of these things is in our own blood, and the mark of them in our own dealings with one another and with God. Calvary was a judicial murder for reasons which are still recognized as legitimate in the politics of the world and the struggle of the market-place. But we cannot see how tragic are these things — the self-love and pride which darken the world—till God makes a screen with His own body and shows them up in their reality upon His outraged love. Does Calvary not judge us as we look at it in this light? Looking

at Christ's murderers, does it not make us feel as an old saint felt when a man of respected character was found out in some moral failure and flung into a prison: "It might have been me!" In Masefield's lyrical story of conversion, it is this appeal which brings the sodden drunkard to his awakening, when the little Quakeress lifts up the Cross:

> Saul Kane, she said, when next you drink,
> Do me the gentleness to think
> That every drop of drink accurst
> Makes Christ within you die of thirst;
> That every dirty word you say
> Is one more flint upon His way,
> Another thorn about His head,
> Another mock by where He tread,
> Another nail, another Cross,
> All that you are is that Christ's loss.

Calvary is the judgment-seat of Christ. It is there we read God's silent verdict and realize its truth.

What *is* this strange process which the suffering Christ sets working in our souls? There is the awakening of the sense of guilt, for one thing, which means the conviction that we are responsible for our sin. Guilt is no mere whimpering weakness of the spirit. The sense of guilt is the charter of our freedom. It is the conviction of our souls that we are not the mere tools of an evil fate, but free and responsible agents.

And there awakens the sense of a personal relation to God, which in our sin we have broken. "Father, I have sinned," was the prodigal's cry in the hour of his coming to himself. These things are all part of the awakening which is salvation. Our true self is found in our sonship to God, and in the sense of sin we realize it. If there had been no sonship there would

have been no sin. Sin is the wrong relationship of the son to God the Father, and the light which reveals our sin is really the light of the Father's face.

Have you seen yourself in the light of Christ? Do you realize in Him what you are, and where you stand,

> The gap between what is and what may be,
> And into what abyss the soul may sink?

The Love which shows you yourself is a love which is thereby revealing Himself. Put yourself into those piercèd hands! Listen to the love that condemns, and you will hear a voice which welcomes you to the Father's fellowship. "This My son," He will say to you, with your burning conscience—"this My son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD

"Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world." —John i. 29.

IN these words Jesus Christ was introduced by John the Baptist to a waiting world. Their authentic nature has been disputed by several scholars. They do not appear in any other of the Gospels. It is strange, men have argued, that John the Baptist, who could know nothing about the future death of Jesus, should use words of such tremendous insight. "Behold the Lamb of God." This was, of course, a reference to the lamb which was sacrificed in Jewish ritual to atone for the sins of the people. How did John come to mirror so clearly what came to pass, and what the world has always found in the death of Jesus? Imagination may give us some clue to the secret of this insight. A writer suggests that the moment of Christ's baptism was the moment of the great discovery. John had come to the world with a message like that of the ancient prophets. He carried the fiery cross of a moral challenge, urging the people to forsake their sins and they would find forgiveness. We get some little idea from the few notes of his preaching, of the kind of things John said to them. No Savonarola ever used the scourge of denunciation so forcefully as John. All kinds of evil came under his lash and there was a great

awakening. Those who came determined to begin a new life, he took down to the water for baptism, which was the sign of their cleansing, and there, before the act of baptism, he listened to their confessions. What stories he heard there on the quiet lake shore, we can dimly imagine! What tragedies of ruined homes and crippled souls and broken peace were poured into his ear! And to him at length Jesus came for baptism, and would take no refusal. At the moment of confession, John waited and wondered what He would have to say—He who had lived a blameless life these thirty years. And Christ, too, made His confession, but it was not a confession of His own sins. It was the sin of the world that was upon His soul, weighing down His spirit, breaking His heart, filling His fine face with shadows. The world's sin and evil lay upon His soul and poured from His lips in a great flood of vicarious penitence.

> Desperate tides of the great world's anguish
> Forced through the channels of a single heart.

As John heard Him speak, his mind lit up with the flash of a great discovery. A veil was lifted at the moment from a great mystery. John had often preached the forgiveness of God—the remission of sins. He believed in God's forgiveness, up to the hilt. For himself, he was sure of it, as sure as he was of his own existence. But forgiveness had its problems for his thoughtful mind. How could God forgive? Such stories of human devilry as he had listened to, stories which had defiled his very ears and scorched his soul! How could God forgive such people? John was no prig, no self-satisfied Pharisee; but a man does not need to be a prig to listen to

some stories of human sin or to read them in the daily newspapers, and then to ask himself how God can forgive. Henry Drummond once said that again and again after he had spent an evening listening to confessions of sin, the question had been forced from him—How can God bear it? How can God forgive? Some feeling like this had doubtless been in John's mind as the underworld of human sin had been opened up in confession.

There was another problem too. He had had many converts, but they did not last. They had confessed and been assured of God's forgiveness and had gone out to live the same kind of life as they were living before. They were bound in the shackles of a moral impotence which his preaching was powerless to break. They needed some stronger dynamic than his poor words could give, some stronger hope, some more piercing vision, to break the fatal spell and set them free. And when Christ stood before him, confessing the sins of the world, with the shadow of an agony falling deep and dark over His soul, in a flash of divine insight John saw a picture which made things clear. He saw a lamb as it had been slain — the poor pathetic patient victim of the Jewish altar, slain in man's age-long effort to get rid of sin. For the moment Christ filled that picture. He was God's own Lamb, God's own Sacrifice, and John cried out, "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world."

This word is John's contribution towards the solution of the biggest problem of history — the personality of Jesus Christ. Who was Jesus? What was His nature? Where do we place Him? Every other great man you can put in some niche, to which

he belongs, some compartment of thought or action. He may be a great thinker, or hero, or saint. But Christ stands alone. Try to squeeze Him into a dictionary of human biography and you will leave out something, something which the scientific historian or literary biographer cannot catch, and that something is everything. What do we make of the problem of Jesus? The moment we try to classify Jesus we realize His uniqueness. It is not enough to say, "Behold the man"; we must get deeper. It is not enough to say, "Behold the teacher," as Nicodemus did. It is not enough to say, "Behold the martyr." We do not reach reality in our view of Christ till we can say, "Behold the Saviour of the world." "Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins." That was the first great word that heralded His coming. We do not see Christ clearly, till we see Him in relation to sin. In the last resort, He has to do with our sin, not with our failure; with the world's evil, not with its suffering; with the redemption of humanity, not with its reformation; with a new heart, not with a better world. Make of it what we will, it is against that hidden rock of sin that the world is for ever making shipwreck. The world needs the gifts of various kinds of men. It needs leaders, teachers, financiers, statesmen. But its deepest need is a Saviour. It is through that need we see the value of Jesus; for the measure of our need is the measure of our vision. The man whose need is deepest finds in Christ most of all. But the man whose need is deepest—most beyond this world's curing—is he who has come to realize his own moral impotence and worthlessness in the face of God, and has been brought

into the mood to cry out, "God be merciful to me a sinner." It is to that man, in that mood, and in that dungeon of deepest need, that Christ comes rising upon the darkness, as if "in the midst of a dark night, day suddenly broke." John was bidding the world look at Christ when thus he saw Him go; but more, he was telling the world what to look for, if they would find the real deep secret of Jesus. "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world."

Let us try to get into the heart of this deep saying, if we can. "Behold the Lamb of God"—that means sacrifice; it suggests an altar; it foreshadows the Cross. "Behold the Lamb of God"—it is a *suffering* Saviour who takes away the sin of the world; that much becomes clear. That much has always been clear to the heart of the world. The Saviourhood of Christ has always been associated with His Cross. Christ's power to help us and to forgive us has always been mirrored in Calvary. How does the suffering Christ become Saviour? That is what we want to know. How does the dying Saviour take away sin? It is true, our salvation does not depend upon our theory of the Atonement. It depends on our experience of Christ's love. There are people who try to pin down the gospel of Christ to a certain theory of why Christ died, or how the death of Christ takes away sin. It does not greatly matter what our theory of the Atonement is, so long as we have the experience. The great doctrines of the New Testament are only efforts to describe experience, not cast-iron moulds into which experience must be run. We are saved not by any doctrine of atonement, or any other doctrine, but through our own insight into the

grace and love of Christ, awakening our response of trust and faith. "Not by the works of righteousness which we have done"—nor by the theological doctrines we have believed—"but according to His mercy He saved us." To see Christ in such a way that we experience the redeeming grace—that is the main thing. But we have minds that crave to understand, and there are prejudices and presuppositions of the mind which stand in the way of our seeing Jesus and obscure the saving vision.

One of the oldest questions in the world since the death of Christ has been the question—why was it necessary for Christ to suffer and to die? Round that question a theological battle has raged for centuries. Did Christ need to have died? "Ought He to have suffered all these things and so to enter into His glory?" That was the question which the disciples debated. They could not understand it at all. For them, His death was tragic, the last grim horror which brought down the night of sheer despair. The answer is, that in the world of His day, living such a life as He lived, preaching such truth as He preached, it was inevitable that He would be put to death. Various forces concentrated in the crucifixion of Christ, but they all come to one thing in the end. It was sin that slew Jesus Christ. It was because men would not listen to Him, that they rose and swept Him out of their world. This is not to say that Christ died unwillingly. He was not a mere victim of a tragedy. He was always master of the situation. He saw what was sure to happen and gave Himself up to the events that were closing in about His life. He saw that the road led to a cross upon the hill, and chose it. It was a calculated

sacrifice. He died because He willed to die, because in such a world as this, it was the inevitable end to a life of truth and love. There is a story of a soldier with one arm, who was standing in the streets one day when an acquaintance came up to him, and said, "Well, old man, I see this war has taken it out of you." "Oh no," said the other, looking at his empty sleeve; "I gave it." That is the point of view from which we must begin to look at the death of Christ. Sin took Christ's life, but Christ gave it; and in that giving, He was more than master of events. For it is the truth of the New Testament, that the sin that put Him on a cross signed with that act its own death-warrant and put into the hands of Christ the mightiest weapon against itself. "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world."

But how does the sacrifice of Christ take away sin? In the first place, it *awakens men to the reality and the consciousness of sin*, and that is the first step toward taking it away. No man can get rid of sin in his life till he has faced it, realized its power, accepted responsibility for it, and so nailed it like a false coin to the counter that it shall no more pass into circulation in his life—with his consent at least. Sin must be acknowledged before it can be taken away. It must be faced before it can be cured. In certain forms of mental trouble where patients suffer from various fears, the process of mind-cure by which they are treated, is to bring to their minds and get them to face, the thing which has produced the trouble. They may be quite unconscious of it. It may lie hidden among the forgotten secrets of memory, but before there can be peace of mind, the thing must be dug up and faced, and then it can be put away. Often

the very facing of it will "raze out the written trouble of the brain." It is the very same with the soul and the dispeace of sin. Sin must be faced and realized and condemned. No gospel will do anything but touch the surface of life which does not deal with sin as a reality. There are gospels of so-called healthy-mindedness which bid us believe there is no such thing as sin, that it is only a theological bogey, creeping out in the twilight of our ignorance like shadows that frighten children; and the thing to do with it is just to fill the world with merriment and sunshine and to say to ourselves with a brave gesture that the thing is not there. The war has helped to disillusion us. It has shown us there is that in the heart of man which, when the hand of God is flung off and the conventions of civilization are broken, will awaken to fury and turn him into a beast. But the lurid forms of sin are not the worst forms of it. The sins that keep life from its power and peace, the sins which in the last reality wreck the world, are not the sensational sins. They are such sins as pride, and jealousy, and greed, and the selfish spirit, and the hate and envy which have their seats in many an outwardly blameless life. How are men awakened to these? In the last resort, there is one vision alone which will bring the revelation of what pride is, and selfishness and hatred and jealousy and greed. It is the Cross of Christ. For it was these things coming to a head which crucified the Son of God. That broken body hanging there so limp and wan, of One who was the fairest life and the noblest spirit that ever breathed this air of time, the very Son of God—that broken body was the fruit of sin. That is the kind of thing sin is, its nature in your heart and

mine,—it crucified the holy Son of God. Can we look long at the Crucified and not see that? Can we stand long under the shadow of Calvary and not feel it? It is for this, Christ died, this awakening to the reality and poison of sin; for there was no other way of awakening the world but to die, to let sin take its full course and come to its tragic culmination in the bloody Cross of Calvary. And that awakening to its deadliness is the first step to the loosening of the shackles. "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world."

But further, the Crucified Christ sets free from sin, *because He reveals the utter love and forgiveness of God, and enables us to realize it and make it ours.* Was the Cross a necessity to our forgiveness? Did Christ need to die in order that we might be forgiven? Did the death of Christ purchase forgiveness for us, as the old theology puts it? There is no warrant for that in the New Testament. John the Baptist preached the forgiveness of sins. Christ blessed men with the pardon of their sins long before He died. Many of the Old Testament saints experienced the forgiveness of God. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases." "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us." There it is, and there is no mention of sacrifice. But how many of them realized this forgiveness? How many of them could see the love that forgave? Think of the sacrifices which made the Jewish altars reek with blood. Why these sacrifices? Why these reeking altars? Because there is something in the heart awakened to the fact of sin which makes it terribly difficult for us to realize the

forgiveness of God. We cannot forgive ourselves. How can God forgive us—the Holy God—the Light in whom there is no darkness, whose light searches our secret hearts to the last fragment of our motives and desires? Turn to the great stories of literature, *The Scarlet Letter*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and a host of others by the really great masters whose books mirror the deep places of the soul, and you will find this sense of the unforgivable thing lying foul about the guilty conscience. To bring the assurance of forgiving love, Christ died. For the Cross reveals a love which loved on, amid the bitterest shafts of human hatred, amid the scorn and jeers of traitors, and in the very agony of death cried, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

That vision of Christ upon His Cross brings home the amazing reality of the divine forgiveness. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool"; it is an easy thing to say that. It is the most difficult thing to get people to believe it, as those of us know who have tried. And Christ found the same difficulty. The world would not realize the sin which darkened it, and having realized it, could not get rid of its fatal blight and guilt till men came and stood before the Cross, where they saw both things together, the reality of sin and the assurance of forgiveness. Sin cannot remain before that vision of love. And that vision of love is the only thing that can put sin away. There is something in us all, when sin comes home to us, which refuses to be content with a cheap and easy forgiveness. There is something which can find no peace save in a pardon which comes through sacrifice and a broken heart. The blame which Christ reveals in us is the unpardon-

able thing which cannot be smiled away by any genial gospel. The forgiveness which brings peace is the assurance of the love of God coming to us, as it were, over the dead body which is sin's darkest deed. "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world."

This is not the way, perhaps, in which some of us would interpret the experience of the Atonement. Every view of the Cross of Christ—and there have been many views of it—is just man's feeble attempt to put into words what Christ put into His Cross, the love of God which passeth knowledge, that love which is able to redeem the worst and to forgive the vilest and to raise the crippled life and to turn the very scars of sin into a purifying memory by which the heart is kept soft and suppliant and alive to God. If we are sure of that love, if we are seeing into its depth and splendour, it matters little by what theory we try to explain the miracle. If the Cross strikes home to the heart, with the love and forgiveness which cleanses and redeems, and brings peace to the soul, and power to the will, we can use what words we may to describe what Christ has done, provided we say nothing which will conflict with the character of God.

On the other hand, some who take the more modern view are apt to disparage the message of the Cross of Christ. I do not care how you state the meaning of the Cross: if you do not see the love of God *there*, you are missing the heart of the Gospel. The late Dr. Denney was once talking to his students of the tendency of some Protestants to minimize the Cross, and he said, "If I had the choice between such a one and a Roman priest holding up the Cross

to a dying man and saying, 'God loves like that,' I had rather be the priest." There is the point—God loves like that! That is the message of the Cross. Our sense of God's love will depend on what we see in the Cross of Christ in relation to our own sin and our own need and the need of the perishing world. "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world."

It is just here that so many people fail of the great salvation, the *full* deliverance which sets them free. "Taketh away" the sin of the world—what does that mean? The word in the Greek is the same John used describing how the women went to the sepulchre and found the stone taken away, the stone which hid their Lord and kept Him in the grave. The taking away of the stone was the prelude to the fellowship of Jesus. It was the prelude for them to the new life of union with Christ and of miraculous service for Christ, which brought down the power of heathendom and made a new world. There is wonderful illumination in this picture of what it means to take away our sin, for the taking away of sin is nothing if it be not the means to a new life and a recovered fellowship with God. Christ rolls away by the vision of Calvary, the thing that is keeping our spirit from resurrection and from power. He takes away sin's power to deceive us, to blind us, to drug our spiritual sense. He takes away the power of sin to hang round our necks a chain of evil memories. He takes away the power of sin to blight our hopes and to enfeeble us by despair. To see there the love of God, rebuking, awakening, forgiving, is the secret of that risen life which is a new creation. Here, gratitude wells up like an everlasting spring.

The knowledge of that forgiveness is the master-motive, the kindling point of Christian enthusiasm. Walter Pater describes with great imaginative insight the gathering of a little Christian Church of the early centuries in a house in Rome. One of the things he pictures is a certain look upon the faces of them all —the expression of "a wonderful sort of gladness, the look of men upon whom some all-subduing experience had wrought heroically and who still remembered a great deliverance." The knowledge that we are forgiven men and women is the abiding secret of power for character, ever renewed and deepened, as we keep our lives open to the vision of Calvary. Whatever springs dry up in the weary ways of life, that spring never fails. And more, it is the dynamic of all great service. The socialist groups have a Sunday school and a hymn book of their own, and in it they have put Matheson's great hymn, "O Love that wilt not let me go." But they have left out the last verse. They sing of love, and joy and light, but of the Cross through which these things live to the world, they know nothing, and will have nothing to do. The defect is fatal. To miss the Cross in our penitence and the Cross in our service, is to meet the evil of the world with a sword which has lost its edge and to stand powerless against the plague of our own hearts. It is to face the suffering earth with a soul devitalized. There is no life except by death. There is no resurrection save through Calvary.

O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red,
Life that shall endless be.

THE OVERCOMING OF DEATH

"Jesus Christ hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."—2 Tim. i. 10.

THE Easter message is like a diamond with many facets. It flashes its glory into our life in all directions. The more we look into it the deeper we see; the more it scatters the darkness which gathers upon our perplexing way. But the central light and heart of glory is its message about death, and its message about death is the message of all light about darkness—the discovery that it is not there. The sun rises and the darkness which looked so solid and impenetrable has gone. It has lifted from our spirits, as the night is banished from the landscape when the dawn breaks over the hills. Jesus Christ hath abolished death.

This statement was more than faith; it was experience. For three days Christ had been lost to His disciples in a grave, but Easter had brought Him back stronger and more radiant than ever. So far as their friendship with Christ was concerned, death had ceased to count. The world in which they walked with Him was a world from which death had disappeared. For the future, it did not enter into their calculations. They did not reckon with it when they made their plans. Perhaps you will say there is nothing so very uncommon in this recklessness of death. There are countless people who have lost the

fear of it. When a great challenge or a great duty stirs the blood, it sweeps our hearts clean of the fear of death; but it is one thing not to fear it, and another thing not to believe in it. It is one thing to shut our eyes to it; it is another thing to face it and see through it. *That* was where the New Testament men stood.

Christ had annihilated death for them, He had abolished death. That is the great Christian victory, and it has penetrated very deep into our lives. One hardly ever meets a bereaved soul, man or woman, who in the first shock of grief is troubled about the problem of death. Grief covers the sky with a pall of cloud, but in most cases there is a triumphant feeling that behind the cloud the light is shining.

This world of ours is pagan in many respects, but it is lit with the after-shine of the resurrection. The Easter fact is in our blood, part of our Christian inheritance. In the Old Testament there is hardly any reference to immortality. The hope of it had not yet emerged. And if you turn to the inscriptions on the ancient tombs of the heathen dead, you will find such inscriptions as this, "To the sweetest babe whom angry gods committed to eternal sleep," or this, "I lived while I lived well, now my story is finished." Walk through one of our modern burying-places, and you will find here and there, it is true, the broken pillar and the note of unavailing sorrow, but for the most part faith breaks out in such triumphant words as these, "Asleep in Jesus," "Because I live, ye shall live also." Our churchyards to-day are resonant with the music of life. Those who set up these memorials may show little sign of any great faith through the daily routine, but deep in their hearts

this hope is buried, and when sorrow comes and stirs the depths it rises to the surface and becomes a raft which saves them out of the wreck. It is part of Christ's great contribution to life. He hath abolished death.

How is it done? Paul goes on to tell us. It is done in the only way in which death can be abolished —by the revelation of life. He hath brought life and immortality to light.

Stevenson tells of a lad who was shipwrecked on an island in the West of Scotland. He was not very far from the mainland, which lay mocking him with its little homesteads and its look of smiling comfort, while he wandered on the islet—a prisoner —with the great deep closing him in. One day, when near the very depth of despair, he hailed a passing boat expecting to be taken off. In reply the fishermen only smiled and shouted some message which he found it difficult to catch, but at last the truth flashed into his mind. He ran to where the shore came nearest to the mainland, and found that the sea which had looked so deep was now sunk at low tide to a mere trickle of water across which he waded with ease. In a moment the sea's ugly threat of separation was abolished. The terror was only make-believe. What looked an impassable sea was really a ford. In the same way death is a small thing when you have seen Christ's vision of life. It is only a gateway to a larger world—a passage where our feet

> Fall on the seeming void
> And find the rock beneath.

Now let us go deeper. How does Christ bring immortality to light? It is the same process as

occurs in the making of any great discovery, of such a physical fact, for instance, as electricity or wireless telegraphy. The first thing that happens is the quickening of a desire. The heart must be awakened to need it and to demand it. The first thoughts of wireless telegraphy, for example, came to man's mind a century ago, but the demand for it did not arise till ordinary telegraphy had advanced some distance and the world had come to depend upon it. A break took place in a cable and business was thrown out of gear. In desperation they sought to send messages which they found reached spasmodically from one broken end of the cable to the other and made a continuous current; and the minds of the scientists were sent exploring in a new world waiting to be conquered. The same thing happened to Columbus in the discovery of America. He saw a plant on the shore one day that quickened his mind and sent his heart out dreaming of some farther coast which he felt must be across the water. As some one says of him, "The instinct of another continent burned in his blood"; the world he lived in became too small for his enlarging mind.

That is what Christ does for us with regard to immortality. The instinct is in our blood and Christ awakens it. We were made for a higher sphere than this death-girt island we call earth. Christ awakens the dormant instinct for the infinite. How does He do it? For one thing He quickens our sense of the value of our own personality. When Christ comes in, we begin to count for something. We begin to count "one." We become a soul, a self, with a value which is infinite. It becomes unthinkable that we should die, should perish, should pass

down into the dust of decay and extinction. He awakens the same instinct by increasing the value of the great things of life—our love, for instance, to one another. He enriches the vital human affections which are the very salt of life. The man who loves Christ will love his children with a finer tenderness, and that deepened love demands immortality.

> If I were drowned in the deepest sea,
> Mother o' mine,
> I know whose love would come down to me,
> Mother o' mine, o' mine.

A love like that demands a sphere beyond the limits of this narrow world. With such a passion, the soul stands by the barrier of death and "cries like a Captain for eternity." And Christ awakens the instinct of immortality by setting us tasks which we cannot half see finished, which, in fact, with only one life before us, it seems hardly worth beginning. Cecil Rhodes was no orthodox believer, but life had touched his soul with the glory of a great task, and his last words were these, "So little done, so much to do." That is the protest which Christ awakens in us. When He comes into a man's life, however dull and dispirited, the first thing that happens to that man is that he becomes aware of a motive for living which earth itself cannot supply. All that, was what happened in the case of the disciples. They had thought very little of the after-life till Jesus came. Bit by bit as His task and His friendship possessed their souls, the need awakened in them, till their last great craving when He was on the point of leaving them, was the demand for a future. It was this hunger, Christ saw leaping up in their hearts and looking out of their troubled eyes,

which made Him say, "Let not your heart be troubled; in My Father's house are many mansions." By awakening the instinct in us, Christ brings immortality to light.

The second thing which needs to be done in making a great discovery, is to open the mind to believe in it. A man will not seek long for anything if his mind can make no room for it. Some time ago a well-known scientist came into full possession of the Christian faith. For years he had longed to be a Christian. Jesus Christ drew his heart like a magnet; his soul demanded faith, his life cried out for it, but he could find no room in his mind for miraculous Christianity. He describes himself as like a man standing on the brink of a river looking for a way to cross and watching for some thought which might become a bridge. When the outlook came, which removed the difficulty in his mind, he crossed over in gladness to give himself to Christ. The same thing holds with regard to immortality—the mind must be open to take it in. Here Christ comes to our aid by the fact of the resurrection. Doubts have been cast upon the story by many people in the last 1900 years, but the fact has persisted—and why? We may dispute the empty grave and certain details in the story; one thing we cannot dispute—the fact that the disciples were changed by something which was big enough to make them utterly different men. Think of their change of mood from grief to gladness, from utter gloom and depression to sheer triumph and victory. Is there any explanation of this change which can be found in the narrow compass of mental science? Here is a fact which meets the mind, "enough for fifty hopes and fears to rap and knock

and enter on the soul," before which the biggest sceptic may begin to doubt his unbelief. Or is there any other explanation of the moral change? Their whole personalities had suffered a reaction. Some of them were cowards before. One of them could not face the laughter of a group of servant girls who taunted him with being a follower of Christ, and he went out to face wounds and death and the ridicule of the whole world. How do you explain it, if it were not due to a presence whom they could know and feel more real than all the threatening world around them. What spiritual power was behind their new-made lives? The explanation is that life was brought to light, and death was shattered. If there is one who finds it difficult to believe in the future life because of his view of the universe, here is a plain fact challenging the mind. What are we going to make of it? If our scheme of things is one that will not hold Jesus—risen and living—it is time our mental world were smashed in pieces and rebuilt. There is only one outlook on the world which is valid to-day, or worthy of a thinking man facing the facts of life. This little world of physical force is but a fragment of a great spiritual universe where Christ is Lord, and death a door that leads to a larger room in the great mansion of life. We need to revise our ideas and find an outlook that is big enough to take in the risen Jesus. The more we look at Him, the closer we come to Him, the more He will make a place for Himself which is all His own. By the fact of His rising, Christ brings immortality to light.

But lastly, there is the possession of the final secret, the assurance of the man who is brought

to say, "I know." How does Christ make us sure of immortality? It is a spiritual secret. The final assurance of immortality is not an argument of the mind; it is a conviction of the heart—the experience of a life already victorious over the tyranny of earth. It is reached through faith by those who will trust Christ and let that experience bring its own conclusions. The scientist has to make experiments before he can be sure of his discovery, and not only once but again and again, till bit by bit the results pile up and the thing can be put upon the market. Even he has to use faith, to take a certain risk of wasting his time and his money. There is no other way to final certainty of any great truth but the way of practical experiment. The man who takes no risks discovers no certainties. The assurance of immortality is a product of experience of the love of God which comes through trusting Christ; and trusting that love means committing our life to its promises and its challenges and its rebukes. What happens then? Our souls break into life as a tree into leaf in every bough with the coming of the spring sunlight. And the life which is eternal is born in our souls.

This life brings its own assurance. It stirs the conviction that in the love of God revealed in Jesus we are in contact with a love and care which is eternal. That is the only final guarantee. Immortality is a spiritual fact, and you cannot prove a spiritual fact except by spiritual perceptions. The real assurance of the future life lies not in deeper explorations of psychic marvels, impressive though these may be. It lies in exploring in daily fellowship with Jesus the marvel of the love of God. No man

can interpret for another in what ways this assurance will come to him. There are certain well-defined ways—the sense of peace, the assurance of forgiveness, bubbling up sometimes like a fountain, in tears of thankfulness. Varied experiences of God come through the changing weather of life. We know the love of God in our own deep souls as we know the sun in the sky—sometimes by the light and sometimes by the shadow. But the full secret is indescribable in words. Can any lover tell a stranger by what subtle tokens he interprets the signs of answered love? If he could, they might mean nothing to a stranger. But the essence of the matter is that in this love which we know, we find our assurance of immortality. It has a value, a quality like great music or great art, to which we give the name "eternal." Fellowship with God has in its very heart, the hall-mark of an imperishable union.

In a Sussex novel there is a story of a man of sordid life who had been seeking God and at last found Him in the glory of a summer morning when he had come to the end of himself and had gone out to make an end. God rose that morning in the beauty of those flowers and grasses as Christ rose from the dead, and broke into his soul with the unutterable sense of a living personal love. Not long after, he lay dying as the result of an accident, but there was hardly any tinge of sadness in his outlook. "It seems to me," he said, "that when I go to God, I am going into the very middle of all that's alive; seems to me that when I go to God, I can never lose the month of May." That is the final assurance —the knowledge of a love which is the secret of

everything that makes life precious, and it comes to us focussed in Jesus Christ.

There is no other way of certainty except what comes through faith. We "could wish for more" like Dr. Johnson. But no more comes, except what faith brings. If more were given us, we would lose that struggle of faith which keeps us alive. All living faith is something for which we have to do battle with what we call the facts of life. And the certainty of immortality is one we have to live for and may have to fight for. It is a living certainty which grows bit by bit and changes its face and sometimes dies, only to be reborn if we keep on fighting for it, trusting it; for "faith," says Chesterton, "is the perpetually defeated thing that survives all its conquerors." It is a "moral certainty" in the full sense of the term—a certainty we cannot have, except on the terms of a moral surrender to Jesus Christ and a life of obedience and trust.

Is there one who has lost it? Begin again with the life of trust in Christ, launching out on the ocean of life in that mighty fellowship. As you sail through the mists into the far horizons, you will begin to descry the land that is very far off. Bit by bit the spiritual world will become *your* world, taking you up into itself, till at last death will be only the "Golden Gate" which opens upon everything—upon life and love and God.

THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT IN ACTION

"I beseech thee for my son Onesimus."—Philemon 10.

THIS little letter of Paul to Philemon lies hidden away in a quiet corner of the New Testament. It is almost obscured from sight among the longer letters, but the New Testament would have been as poor without it, as the woods without violets. It tells in its own artless way and in the story which lies behind it, how Christ comes into a man's life, not merely to answer his problems and settle his doubts—all that is important. But it also tells this, which is just as important, how Christianity sweetens the relations between man and man, how Christ steps in to dissolve the bitterness, to soften the misunderstandings, to put us right with one another in the little things in which we often go wrong, and finally to set our varied relationships on such a footing that our little circle of friends or associates shall become part of that blessed society of souls which is the Kingdom of God.

We must begin with the story. We only gather it in outline, but it is as romantic as any tale of fiction and far more beautiful than most, and it has the merit of being true. There are no such wonderful and beautiful things in all the world as those that happen to men and women when they come into touch with Christ. Here, then, is the story. Philemon was a rich and prosperous citizen of Colossæ, and he dwelt

there with Aphia his wife and Archippus their son. When Paul was preaching in that district, Philemon was converted, and his wife and son as well. Thereafter he became, like many of Paul's converts, a firm friend of the apostle: he was moreover a leader in the little church. Like every well-to-do citizen, Philemon kept slaves. They did not know any better till the new leaven of Christianity began to work in their lives and they found that these things could not go on. Onesimus may have been a good slave or a bad one. The story suggests that he had his faults. How could anyone make a man a slave and then expect from him anything else but slave morality? A slave who was also a saint would be a miracle, and nothing shows the marvel of the grace of God more than the fact that it produced that kind of miracle. One day Onesimus ran away from his master, taking with him various things of value. Driven no doubt by a guilty conscience, and the better to hide himself, he made for Rome, which was like many great modern cities—the sink into which the worst characters in the land gather, in order to be lost in the stream. Then a strange thing happened. In the very place where he had fled to hide himself, Onesimus was discovered, not by Philemon or the trackers of runaway slaves, but by a greater pursuer. The Divine love followed Onesimus. Conscience pursued him. The Spirit of God sought him out. How it happened we do not know. Perhaps his past suddenly flashed upon him in a face from the crowd, as in the case of Tito in George Eliot's *Romola*. Tito had run away from his duty, which was to free his benefactor from slavery, and was climbing up the ladder of fashion and position by means of the money which

had been entrusted to him for this sacred duty. He plunged into the stream of life at Florence imagining he was safe from pursuit, except in the haunting voice of conscience which in time he hoped to stifle. But just when he was getting along famously and all was merry as a marriage bell, he caught a glimpse of a face in the crowd one day and eyes looked into his for a moment that seemed to scorch his very soul. It was his benefactor, escaped and mad for revenge, burning with a remorseless scorn and hatred. There is no place in all this world big enough to hide a man from the pursuit of conscience and the harrying of guilt. For whether it come in vengeance or in shame or in sorrow, the thing that haunts and tracks us down is the love of God seeking to win us, to find us, to hold us with the passion which never lets men go.

> Still with unhurrying chase
> And unperturbèd pace,
> Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
> Came on the following feet and a voice above their beat,
> Nought shelters thee who wilt not shelter Me.

So it is ever in life. There is no use in seeking to get away from God, for the very things we do to get away from Him, are playing their part in bringing us back to Him. The very roads by which we flee, the sorrowful road, the lonely way, the primrose path, lead to the places where He will meet us by and by. We do not know what it was that brought Onesimus under the influence of Paul in his prison. A chance meeting with one, perhaps, who had been with Paul in Colossæ and was with him now in Rome, and whose very face, as Onesimus met him on the street, let loose a flood of recollection and broke him down, till he allowed himself to be led to Paul and there

found Christ. But we do know that this man, fleeing from shame and conscience and God, ran straight into God's arms.

It is such a fine story that one would like to linger over it, and let one's imagination play with it, and brood for a little longer on the marvellous inescapable love. But we are to think of one or two things in the letter, and the story just brings us to the point where we can understand these.

Onesimus was not very long a Christian before he found himself faced with a strait gate and a narrow way. That is a common experience, and Christ led us to expect it—the strait gate and the narrow way, and over them the shadow of the Cross. For Christ creates just as many difficulties as He removes. He sets just as many problems as He solves; though the difficulties Christ brings by His demands upon us, are not the sordid, miserable difficulties that we make for ourselves in the entanglements of selfishness. They are clean difficulties—the steps of the ascent by which we climb to God and by which God makes it possible for us to climb. For every difficulty conquered is a step *upward*; every strain is an offer of strength. So Onesimus had to face his difficulty, his narrow way. He had to go back to Philemon and put himself at his disposal. Slavery was wrong, though Onesimus did not know it. But in any case he could not make a right by doing a wrong. He had to go back and ask forgiveness for the theft, and put himself in the hands of Philemon, risking the hardship he might have to suffer and facing the sneers and the shame of the little community. He had to learn, to put it in another way, that the forgiveness of God does not mean the cancelling of consequences. The

forgiveness of God does not cover any wrong. We must stand up to the situation into which sin has brought us, facing it with the help of God. Where it is possible for us to make amends, it is our business to do it.

Let no man who reads this letter say that Christianity does not hold out for absolute straightness of dealing between man and man. Onesimus the slave, crushed and downtrodden it may be, had grace enough to know that he could never look Christ in the face without sorrow till he could look his brother man in the face without shame. That truth lies at the very heart of Christianity. Christ came to make us terribly sensitive in our dealings with our brother man, demanding straightness, honesty, fairness. The fellowship of Christ is a circle which is not complete till it includes our relationships with others. A flaw in our contacts with men is like a fault in the electric circuit; the current is broken through which our own souls are lit by God's love. And there is nothing that hides the face of God from us so much as the stupid grudges and bitternesses that we feel and nurse toward others. "If then," said Christ, "thou art come to the altar to offer thy gift, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, first go and be reconciled to thy brother, and *then* come and offer thy gift." It is as serious as that! There is no peace in the house of God, no peace in God's friendship for any man, till there is peace between him and his brother so far as he can put wrong right. So back goes Onesimus to Philemon. We can imagine how, when the decision was taken and he set his face eastwards towards Colossæ, there came into his soul such a glory of light and peace, that it must have seemed as if the

dawn had risen upon a night of darkness and troubled dreams.

But it was going to be just as hard for Philemon; and that is the meaning of the letter. He too had to face his strait gate and his narrow way. For Christ was going to demand this of him in the name of his faith, that he should forego all the penalties which a master exacted of a runaway slave and put him back in his old place and forgive the debt. Now we are not honest with ourselves if we do not realize that that was to be a very hard thing for Philemon. He was not only to deny the human passion for revenge, for what men often call, or miscall, justice. The whole social order would be up against him. They would tell him it was a direct encouragement to rebellion among the slaves. They would call him sentimental and foolish. And further, there would be the humbling to his own pride. For notice what Paul is asking of him in the name of Christ. He is asking of him this terribly hard thing, not only to wipe off the past and let the debt go, but to receive this man not as a slave, not even as a reformed slave, but as a brother beloved, a kinsman in Christ, a man with an equal place and right in the love of God. That is unspeakably difficult — it looks like folly. But it had to be done. It was the Christian way, and one of the Bible names for a Christian is "a fool for Christ's sake." Christ was calling him to bridge over that chasm of which Coleridge speaks, that wound which goes so deep that nothing can heal it, and of which "neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder," nor any of nature's processes can take away the hurt and scar. Some one remarks that a man never realizes what it is to be really Christian till he has stood before

one whom he has wronged and asked forgiveness for his sin. That is the humbling which, in the eyes of Christ, is exaltation. But it seems to me that a man never realizes what it means to be really Christian, really forgiven, till he has stood before one who has greatly wronged him and held out his hand. For at that moment he knows a pain in hands and head and heart such as came upon One who hung upon a Cross. It is a simple lesson, the duty of forgiveness, the forgiveness that is willing to look upon the man who has wronged you, if he repent, as your redeemed brother, your kinsman in Christ, and to trust him again even at the risk of his deceiving you, yet it is the only way to a high understanding and an abundant entrance into the forgiving love of Christ. We never know the sweets of forgiveness till we have learned by our own pain what it means to be angry with a man and suspicious of him, and yet forgive him and trust him a second time. We never get even a little glimpse into what it cost Christ to forgive us, until we come to know something of what it costs us to forgive others. This free forgiveness Christ demanded of Philemon, and this, I am persuaded, is what He is demanding of our Christianity to-day—facing us with a narrow gate by which we will either pass into a larger kingdom, or stand outside drinking our own bitter cup of revengeful memories.

We do not know whether Philemon rose to the occasion. Tradition tells us that he did. It is difficult to see how he could well refuse this tender and winsome appeal of Paul. For Paul does not speak in the tones of a spiritual overlord. He speaks with persuasion. There is just a gentle hint here and

there, a hint of the Cross and of what the Christian society will expect of Philemon, just enough to suggest the beautiful way, and yet leave him the right to feel that he has done this thing of his own free will.

We can be certain that Philemon did take Onesimus back. And the letter gives us a glimpse of a curious situation which was very common in these early days of Christianity. It suggests a master and a slave bound to each other by the most cruel and unchristian of ties which men ever forged for their fellows—the chain of slavery—and yet regarding each other not as master and slave only, but as brothers in Christ, a deeper thing than even blood brotherhood, the deepest and divinest thing in heaven and earth. That curious situation tells us one or two things about Christianity which I want to put in a word.

For one thing, it tells us that Christianity brings the best out of all the relationships of life, whatever they may be. Their new relationship as Christian men did not make either of them, and was not meant to make either of them, scornful of their duties as master and slave, or callous to their responsibilities. Onesimus would be the best slave any man ever had, true and devoted and obedient and respectful, to the last ounce that was in him. And Philemon would be the best master a slave ever had, tolerant, kindly, considerate to the very last degree. When Onesimus went away, Philemon had lost an indifferent slave, whom, in fact, he was better without. When he came back after having passed into the hands of Christ, he was a slave to whom duty was music, whose work was lit with love. Christ enriches the relationships of life. A servant may have a bad master, but Christianity

never gives him an excuse for being a bad servant. A man may have a bad servant, but no slackness or any other thing will excuse him for being a bad master. The conditions of life may not be good, and the relations in which we stand to one another may not be ideal, but Christianity, when it is real, will make them as good as they *can* be. When Christ comes in, the whole outlook of life and work and service is lifted above the narrow horizons of our own pleasure, or even of the accepted standards, and becomes centred on Christ. A Christian man ought to be the best master, the best servant, the best friend, the best lover—just because he belongs to Christ.

There is a second thing. Christianity overleaps the mechanical and often artificial relationships of life. Here were Philemon and Onesimus, master and slave, and yet deep in their hearts, all that was forgotten. It was not the *main* thing. They became brothers, sons of God, equal in God, with the brand of the slave and the dignity of the master alike overcome by the lustre which came to them both from the shadow of the splendour of the Cross. When they were nearest to Christ, when they knelt at prayer, when they took the sacrament, that common feeling and faith submerged the barriers till they forgot them altogether. That is the next highest thing Christ does with our social differences. He brings in a love, a sympathy, a respect, a kinship, which transcends them altogether. Paul rose to it in its fullest range. You remember what he says somewhere about women speaking in churches, and there are one or two other hints that there is something just a little inferior in the gentler sex. But he gets over all that. There are relations in which the differences must stand, and each must

be its best and develop its own function, the glory of manhood and womanhood. But in Christ there is "neither male nor female"—these distinctions go—"neither male nor female, neither bond nor free, neither Jew nor Greek," yes! and He would have gone further to-day, neither British nor German, but all are one before God, with all surface differences gone—only the naked souls capable of pain and sin and sorrow and redeeming joy. So Christianity leaps over the artificial frontiers of life.

But there is a third thing. It is not in the story, but it sprang out of a situation like this. When Christ comes into any human relationships, He not only makes them the very best of their kind, and gives us grace to disregard all barriers which would keep us from being our best to each other: He does more. If the relationships are wrong, He changes them, breaks them down at last, as a stream which is rushing full and strong, breaks down the narrow banks and makes new channels of its own. This is what happened with slavery. What was it that abolished slavery? It was Christianity. There are people who wonder why Paul seems to take slavery for granted, and there are some who used to argue that as there was slavery in the New Testament there will always be slavery, just as they argue that because there is war in the New Testament there will always be war. It was Christianity that broke down slavery, swept it out. And how did it do it—by means of a situation like this portrayed or suggested in this letter. Fifty years ago slavery was abolished in America. How was it done? It was through one man of genius carrying into his political life the logic of this principle of brotherhood,

and risking everything upon it. There is a passage in Mr. Drinkwater's fine play, *Abraham Lincoln*—which portrays the very same situation. During the Civil War an old negro preacher, Frederick Douglas, pays a visit to Lincoln, who holds out his hand and bids him take a chair. The old negro, schooled by habit, refuses to sit down. "But I am black," he says, "and you are white." "No, no," says Lincoln, "we are just two old men talking together." There it is, neither black nor white, but just two old men, each with a burden on his soul, facing the common challenge of Jesus. That is Christianity in action. When a master and slave became Christian they became brothers; they saw each other in Christ against the background of the Cross—the only way to look at a man if you want to see the very truth about him. That kind of relationship went on for a while, but after a bit they began to see that it could not last. The relation of master and slave was too narrow and gross and cruel a thing to hold the river of this Christian love. It became intolerable to look at a man in the light of Christ and love him in Christ and at the same moment put chains on him and make him a slave. The thing could not stand, and it broke —Christianity broke it by creating and inspiring the right spirit, the Christian spirit, and the Christian outlook, in master and slave alike. There are many things in our relations to-day between man and man and class and class which are wrong and unchristian. Even as they are, Christianity can sweeten them. But the way to put them right is not to break them down from without, by any hammer stroke of revolution. There never was revolution yet, which did not create as much injustice as it pretended to abolish.

The way out of it all is to bring in the new spirit. There is no social utopia of our dreams which can come in any other way. It is the living breath of Christian goodwill we need to-day. Nothing else will heal the division between class and class, between man and man, between nation and nation. The lack of it has been the ruin of every effort that men have made to create heaven upon earth. Let in the new spirit and it will make the new channels.

Perhaps the very crisis of things will bring this home to us to-day, just as it took the violent separation of Onesimus and Philemon to bring them together as brothers. Surely, a deeper reconciliation is one of the things God is seeking to bring out of the strifes and conflicts of these days. He is calling to us across the chasms of our separation, to seek in Christ the spirit which shall bring us together as never before. When all the bitterness is over, through God's hand at work upon us, it may be said of us and of those from whom we have been separated by misunderstanding, or class interests, or national hostilities, "perhaps they were parted from us for a season, that we might receive them for ever."

AN ECLIPSE OF FAITH

"Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"—Matt. xi. 3.

MANY great voices have spoken to the world from a prison. The explanation is simple. The world has always tried to silence its saints and its prophets by shutting them up. But because truth is a thing which cannot be silenced, the prison has become a pulpit, and the word spoken in a dungeon has reverberated to the ends of the earth.

It was not a very stirring word, however, which John spoke in the prison of Machaerus. It was a question—a doubt. What a contrast between this question and his striking testimony to Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world." There, he had bidden the world look at Christ and see in Him the central Figure of the ages, the long expected Redeemer. Now his mind seems to have changed, he is overcast with doubt. "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"

The contrast makes a problem which many people have found very difficult. How are we to explain this descent from the sunny height to the dark valley? Some have tried to say that the first great saying is unhistorical, and that John had all along been in doubt—which is the line of least resistance.

Others have tried to argue that John himself was not in doubt, but that he was concerned to build up the faith of his disciples — sending them to Jesus to find their own evidence. But any man who knows the moods of the mind in the long fight with faith will understand. It was a temporary eclipse. Once, in a time of clear insight, John had seen Christ in His glory. Then the clouds had returned again, and for the moment there was darkness. It is easy to see how it may have happened. With his conscience aflame for righteousness he had stood up to Herod, denouncing his private life, and had been flung into prison. There, in the darkness, a reaction had come upon him; a kind of paralysis of faith had set in. Every man has his black hour in which he cannot see in anything the face of God. Sometimes, in the first dumb hour of a great sorrow the light of faith seems to be quenched; the spiritual voice is silenced; earth with its walls of savage and brutal fact, closes in about us, and heaven is shut out. We have to wait for the spirit to recover its tone, and regain its wings, and begin to soar above the prison house. It is never altogether easy to keep faith. In Browning's phrase, doubt is always more or less alive, like a snake wriggling beneath our foot. There is always the last grim uncertainty every now and again flinging its challenge in our teeth. Some moments we are quite sure and never a doubt finds tongue; but ever and again the questions start and have to be dealt with. It is a conflict all through, though a conflict through which faith gains and enlarges and keeps alive. If the facts of faith were *assured*, patent to the world, they would soon become as dull in their interest as any accepted fact of

science and pass into the limbo of the commonplace. But every now and again something happens to stir the waters, and faith has to meet a new threat to its security. Science cast doubt, for instance, upon the first chapters of Genesis and men had to find a larger faith to meet the challenge. The war breaks in and for the moment faith totters and seems buried in the débris of a shattered world, but out of the ruins it rises again, richer, deeper than ever, and stands more surely upon its feet. The experience of faith and its insight into the heart of God is the one thing which cannot be destroyed in all this perishing and changing world. But an eclipse of faith such as may come to us all, troubled John. Who can doubt but that, had he lived long enough, it would have passed? Meantime, out of the night that covered him, he sent the message, big with question, to Jesus, "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"

But there is more in this question than a doubt. There was an unquenchable hope, a burning heart of aspiration. "Art Thou He that should come?" If John had stopped there, we might have felt the light had gone completely. But he adds a word that rallies us like a trumpet call, "Or do we look for another?" John is still a seeker, still out on the search for God. He may have been baffled and disappointed for the moment. He thought he had found in Christ the end of his quest, and now it seemed as if he had been wrong. It seemed as if Christ did not fit the picture he had carried in his heart all these years, waiting for the face to fill it. But nevertheless he is going on. There is something fine in this word, "DO we look for

another?" Must the seeker take up the long trail again? Must the watchman get back to his tower and begin afresh to look over the plains for the coming of God's relief? A prison is a poor look out, but nevertheless John is going on. The ship may be sinking, but the flag is still flying. The storm may rage and all hope seem dead to every one else, but his lamp is still in the window.

There is all the difference between John and many another disappointed seeker. How easily we give up the spiritual quest! Andrew Carnegie had pinned all his hope to the prospect of world peace. It was the great dream of his life. And when war broke out and shattered his dream to pieces, he had no higher hope on which to fall back. It was the end of everything, "Henceforth he was never able to interest himself in private affairs again. Many times he made the attempt to continue writing but it was useless. He died of a broken heart." So writes his widow. He himself wrote in his diary these last words. "As I read this to-day, what a change! (1914). The world convulsed with war as never before. Men slaying each other like wild beasts. I dare not relinquish all hope. In recent days I see another ruler coming forward upon the world stage, who may prove to be the immortal one." But had he lived, would not that hope have been shattered too? "Trust not in man," says the Psalmist, "whose breath is in his nostrils."

Some people lose their hope because they have no staying power. How small a thing will turn some men from the quest of Christ! "Once find

the truth," says a writer, "and then objections are nothing." But *before* we find the truth, a stone in the path will turn the weary feet aside. Talk with men who have given up their faith and you will find out what little things are blocking their vision. They never had much faith. Some one they trusted betrayed them, and they flung over religion. They were cold-shouldered in a church, and they will have nothing more to do with Jesus Christ. Think of John, disappointed, flung into a dungeon, his hope in Jesus shattered, yet he is going on. "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"

This Messianic hope of the prophets is one of the most wonderful things in history. Through long centuries, a nation dreamed of the coming of a great prince of God who should bring their nation out of obscurity and exile and put things right. This hope rose high at times, and at times burned low. When they were prosperous, their hope often faded like a smouldering wick, but when the night of exile came upon them, the little candle of their hope in God flamed out, to become the light of all their day. It was a crude hope in many ways. They were waiting for a prince, a judge, a conqueror. But even so, the hope stood for a great thing. It was their refusal to be reconciled to a universe without God. It was a faith that God would never have showed them so many mercies and taken them so far on the highroad of a great destiny, without taking them further. It was their assurance that life would never have lured them on with so many promises and then left them desolate, like a man who follows a mirage. It was their faith that good is bound to

triumph, that evil and unrighteousness are not the last word. Somehow, God will find means to come to the rescue of the tried and tempted. Some day, God will come over the hills to relieve His beleaguered garrison. At bottom the universe is not material but spiritual, based on a spiritual order which is bound to rise into the light and reveal itself with judgment for its foes, and triumph for its allies. What a brave thing is this hope of John! He was sure in the end, God was not going to disappoint him. "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"

Now a hope like this is the greatest heritage of life. It is the finest thing in our souls, even though we have not yet found the fulfilment of it. It keeps the windows open that the dawn may shine in. It keeps us sensitive to the approach of God. Even if we have nothing else, let us cherish it. Even if we have not found in Christ all we had expected, let us never give up hoping. Despair is the deadly thing. Despair of God, and of what He is seeking to give us and to make us, is the end of everything.

God will forgive thee all but thy despair.

Have we been tried beyond measure, with one thing failing us after another, till there seems nothing else to live for? Never let us give up hope. Have we been tempted, and fallen again and again, till we feel there can be little reality in religion? *Never let us give up hope*; we have not found the key, that is all; we have not seen Jesus. Have we been misty about religion, perplexed, finding no sense of reality in all the experience of which others speak? Something

is there, we feel, but it is not for us, and we are beginning to settle down to things as they are, and to a life without the friendship of God. No! Never give up the quest. Never let doubt harden into despair. Some day God will lead us into the great secret if we keep the mind alert and watchful for His coming.

> No cloud across the sky but passes at the last,
> And gives us back the face of God once more.

Now, of course, if John had lived long enough, he would have come to realize that his great hope was really fulfilled in Christ. We cannot imagine John who had hailed Christ, with that wonderful insight, as the "Lamb of God," drifting into a back-water while the stream of God's grace ran by. We cannot imagine him holding on for ever to the form of his hope so that he missed the substance. For that is what the men of his time were doing. There are various reasons why people become disappointed in Christ and fail to find in Him the answer to their spiritual hunger. One of them is that they are misled by wrong views of Christ, by conventional pictures, by misunderstandings of His real character. They will not go and discover Him for themselves. Jesus Christ must be a man's own discovery, as he searches the gospel with the eyes of his own need. God meets men on the plane of their own individual need, not through some need which is not theirs. One of the secrets of religious unreality lies just here, does it not? We try to force ourselves into the position of others, and seek for experiences which can never be ours till life brings us where they have been; and one day, when we are frank with our own souls we find ourselves out in a game of make-believe. No

man has a faith at all which is not a faith of his own. "Christ comes to each man," says George MacDonald, "down his own secret stair."

> When I am most perplexed it may be there
> Thou mak'st a secret chamber, holy, dim,
> Where Thou wilt come to hear my deepest prayer.

We may not see in Him what others see, but if we look closely, we will find in Him the real fulfilment of the deepest hopes and aspirations of our souls, as life awakens them day by day with its challenge, and its longing, and its rebuffs. There is no need to look for another. *All of God* is there for us in Jesus.

There is another reason which brings disappointment with Christ. The fact that John was in prison gives us a glimpse of it. It is a misunderstanding of what Christ came to do, and how He works. John had been brought up on the great advent hope, and the advent hope was material, not spiritual. It was the expectation of a God who would come in judgment, smiting evil, breaking to pieces the oppressor, and setting the humble and obedient in high places. But Christ had come, and here was John, His herald —flung into a prison by the decree of a licentious king—and nothing happened! The tyrant world rolled on its way unrebuked. Rome, with her legions, held Palestine, "God's own country," in a massive grip all the more galling because it was benevolent. The Messiah went on teaching and preaching, and working cures on sick bodies. Is it any wonder that with so crude a view of the advent hope, John should ask, "Art Thou He that should come"?

How many people are missing Christ to-day, because of crude views of what Christ will do!

They see the world going on its own old way. Evil seems to flourish; wrong and selfishness seem to pay. Christianity appears to work neither very quickly nor very powerfully. And we say to Christ, "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" It is a wrong view of Christianity which is at the root of all this disappointment. For Christ comes in love, to win the world through love, because there is no other way of winning it. Not even God can rush a man, or drive a man into the Kingdom. No man is in the Kingdom who has not seen for himself the love of God in Christ and made a free response to it. As for the distressed and the burdened, Christ did not come in the first place to lift their burdens from without. He came to bring the new spirit in which burdens would become bearable, a new attitude to life which would bring a constant victory. Not to take John out of prison, but to awaken the spirit of faith and courage by which the prison would become something else—a church, as it was for many of the early Christians; a pulpit, as it was for Paul; a picture gallery, as it was for Bunyan; the vestibule of heaven, as it was for John the apostle. Such is the victorious power of the love of God, the doors of the prisons have been opened, and the prisoners' bands been loosed. It is through that victory of the spirit that tyranny has been destroyed. For tyrants have learned that it is no use putting men like Paul or Bunyan into prison. They escape every time by turning the prison into something else. Then a thing is seen these tyrants never saw before, and they begin to ask themselves whether these are indeed the kind of men who ought to be in prison. So the spirit of the Kingdom has been the

most shattering and revolutionary force in history. That spirit Christ revealed, and led men into its secret. It is not by any stroke of miracle or supernatural force He saves us. It is not by lifting our troubles; it is by saving us *in* our troubles from despair, from defeat, from bitterness, from the mind that looks on difficulties as foes. There is no other way of saving us than by saving us in our world. It is by that victory of the spirit that the world itself comes to be redeemed.

But Christ is disappointing to many people because they are not finding in Him all He can give. They are not entering to the full into the Christian experience. It is startling to read the New Testament and ponder the words of Christ: "The Kingdom of God is at hand"; "The Kingdom of God is within you." What did He mean? Did He not mean that the power of God is *here* at our very hand for the conquest of evil and sin and the changing of the world, if only we have faith enough to use it, if only we would utterly trust Christ as He trusted God. The belief in the second advent of Christ which many people hold, the belief that Christ is at hand and that He is returning to the earth in the near future, misses this point. It is a great thing to have such a hope, if we do not become tied to the form of it. It is a great thing to keep the soul awake to the fact that God will not leave us to despair, or to the mercy of events, or the sport of evil. It is a great thing to believe that this world is God's and that eventually He is coming to reign in it. But the form of this advent hope may be cheating some of us out of the substance, which is the immediacy of God in Christ to every need, to

the overcoming of evil, to the conquest of sin. We long for some new appearing of God. But He is here! Is there any other manifestation which could hold more of God than Jesus does? Is there any appearing of God which could make Him more accessible to us than He is in Jesus? Would Christ be any nearer to us than it is possible for Him to be to-day, if we met Him walking down the street to-morrow morning? It is our spiritual grasp of Him which counts, not the material handshake. It is our attitude to His truth, not the bowing of the knee and the lips that call Him "Lord"; it is our knowledge of His mind that matters, not the vibrant challenge of His voice. Why need He have gone away at all, as He Himself said, if it were not to bring Him nearer, shaking us free of His material touch, to compel our spiritual apprehension.

The truth is that for all of us, Christ is very largely an unexplored possibility. John Newton, the hymn writer, tells a story of a preacher friend of his, who had given only a cold superficial consent to the truths of the gospel. He was reading one day in the Ephesians, when he was arrested by that great word of Paul—"the unsearchable riches of Christ." "The apostle," he said to himself, "uses most remarkable words. He speaks of heights and depths and lengths and breadths of things that are unsearchable. Now I have known nothing of this in Christ." And he began to study and search, till the words of Paul and of Christ became alive with reality. Is not this very much the case with those who are disappointed in Christ, or who are longing and hoping for some salvation beyond what comes through faith in Him? Why does the Kingdom

tarry? Why need it tarry? There are infinite marvels in the physical world waiting for the open eye and the open mind. They are there at our doors, knocking. They are there in the tubes and under the microscope, as a research scholar said to me the other day. Is it different with the spiritual world, the world of divine forces? Have we been to the depths of the inexhaustible resources of Christ?

Most of us have listened to the common complaint that Christianity has failed, till we are sick of the phrase. It has become the cant of many, who say it with a triumphant sneer, which ill conceals the fact that they never wanted Christianity to succeed. Yet the phrase stands for a confession that the war has found us out in much religious unreality. If Christianity has failed, it is because there are depths in Jesus that have never been explored. The war has uncovered *our* failure, not His—our failure to be true to His trust. And its message is a call to move out.

It is a larger, braver spirit of adventure we need, if we are to make a deeper discovery. I remember, some years ago, a fleet of torpedo boats was anchored in Oban Bay. How safe they looked in that land-locked haven, in the calm of a sunny afternoon! But at night a storm swept down the Sound and immediately there was great confusion, the play of searchlights, the shriek of sirens, and one by one they left the safe anchorage and steamed out to sea. What had happened? This: their short cables were safe enough for calm weather, but in the narrow bay these could not hold the ships when the storm was up. The only place of safety and freedom was the wide deep sea without. That is the message for

our time, with its confusion and strain. The narrow sea of our restricted religion, and the short cables of our mechanical attachments to Christ are not only useless; they are dangerous to faith. We must move out into the deeper ocean of His love and the wider tasks of His Kingdom, if we would find Him afresh. Our faith must strike once more the great notes of trust and adventure. Then life will fill with the music of His love.

THE TYRANNY OF THINGS

"Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."—Luke x. 41, 42.

THIS story has raised more controversy than any other in the Bible, except perhaps the case of Esau and Jacob. In spite of the Bible estimate, most people have a sneaking fondness for Esau, while Jacob is almost universally despised. In this case most people have the feeling that Martha, the practical housewife, has been a little harshly judged.

The story is one of those familiar incidents which are part of our everyday lives. With a little imagination we can see the whole thing happening before our eyes. The sisters lived together and Christ was their great friend. One day He made a sudden visit to their house, probably accompanied by other friends. Hospitality demanded that they should be given a meal. Martha set about getting it ready, and soon there was great commotion in the kitchen. But Mary, on the other hand, lingered in Christ's presence, and finally settled herself at His feet, drinking in His words till her mind became absorbed and dinner was forgotten. For a while Martha said nothing, but at last her irritation mastered her and she exploded on the company in righteous indigna-

tion. "Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her come and help me." But Jesus turned on her with a gentle rebuke, smiling the while, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Our first instinct is to feel that Christ has hardly done justice to Martha. She was the practical woman whose love finds an outlet in caring for what we call the "creature" comforts. After all, we would not get on well without a housewife in the kitchen, especially with guests in the house. If all women were Marys, who would cook the dinner? Does Christ do full justice to Martha's womanly instincts, not to speak of her self-denial, for she, as well as Mary, must have been longing to listen to His talk?

Some people solve this problem by talking of two temperaments. Mary was the thoughtful and mystical type with no head for practical details and no taste for housework. Martha was the kind of person who is never so happy as when she is busy about a house. The one makes the poetry, the other the prose of life, and neither can be turned into the other. Mr. Stephen Graham sees these two temperaments illustrated in Russian and English religion. The Western type is business-like and practical in its religion—the Eastern type is mystical and contemplative, caring for no pain or discomfort while the soul dreams of hidden things. But the problem is not so easily solved as that. Christ was an Eastern, but His mind was universal. No one was ever so perfectly balanced in nature so harmoniously blended

as Jesus. What did He mean by this rebuke to Martha?

The answer is simple and gets to the root of many of the troubles of life. It was a clear case of the tyranny of *things*. Things have their place in life. We live in a material world. Our nature has its physical side. Right through, life is a traffic in things which our hands handle and our bodies wear. Our most spiritual fellowships have their medium in material things—gifts, words, smiles, caresses. All these on the material side are things. The dearest word of love is only a vibration in the ether striking upon a sensitive bit of nerve. The finest violin music is on the material side only "the scraping of hair upon catgut." Life is one long piece of symbolism. The trouble comes when things take the first place and lose their meaning by becoming an end in themselves. Then life is materialized and we lose it through absorption in the mechanism of living. This was what was happening to Martha. The tyranny of things was getting hold of her. It was this Jesus rebuked. "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about *things*: but Mary has chosen that better part, which shall not be taken away from her."

There are two suggestions here. In the first place it was a warning, and a plea for simplicity in the material things of life. Christ did not mean that the guests should go without their dinner. The body must be fed. No man can live the highest kind of life on a starvation diet. He did not expect His message to get home to people whose bodies were weary with toil and bitter with need. That is what we often forget. Some people would deal with others

as if they were pure spirit. There is no such being—on this planet at least. There are people in our own land who are physically incapable of listening to any gospel of love which eloquence of persuasion can utter. They are sunk in a death-struggle for existence which takes up all their thought and leaves them nothing over. It is difficult not to be a materialist when a man is starving. The body must be satisfied before the soul can rise into the contemplation of higher things. There are people to whom you cannot carry the gospel in any other form than a loaf of bread—to them the only sacramental medium of the love of Christ.

But that is far from saying that we are to swing to the opposite pole. The trouble is we so readily drift into an artificial standard of what is necessary for life. Christ's demand was very simple. He did not want an elaborate meal, only a simple dish, which Martha could have prepared without much trouble or any strain to her spirit. But Martha had her own ideas. She had doubtless a reputation for hospitality. What would people think if she did not rise to the occasion? So the process of elaboration went on, till the dinner became the end and object of her care instead of the medium of her friendship. Her love lost itself in seeking too fine a way of expressing itself, and her mind became overloaded with worries which clouded her spirit and filled the whole house with unrest. "One thing is needed," said Christ. It was a plea for simplicity. Do not let *things* become your master. Do not let your life be so burdened with things that its meaning is lost. Do not let the means of living become the master of life. His warning and His call come home to us to-day. How

many people, for instance, begin life with certain necessities. As their income grows they add luxuries, and feel aggrieved if they cannot get them. They climb into a higher social scale which demands a larger house, greater spending, more elaborate entertaining. So the tyranny of things grows, while all the time, if only they knew it, they are losing peace and freedom and opening their souls to a thousand petty anxieties and disappointments. How many people to-day imagine they possess a house while in reality the house possesses them! How many are there who spend their days following a fashion which in their hearts they despise, making calls in which there is no friendship, giving their days to rounds of social duty and fashionable entertainments which bore them to extinction, but from which their artificial society gives them no release.

> They con the ritual of routine
> With minds to one dead likeness blent,
> And never even in dreams have seen
> The things that are more excellent.

We can become the victims of plenty as well as the victims of poverty. We can be sunk in a mansion as well as in a hovel. When "the thing to do" becomes more important than the rightness of the man who does it or the spirit he puts into it, life is being lost in seeking it, and the car has begun to run off with the driver.

The real truth is that half of the things we call necessities are not necessities at all but superfluities, and we should be a good deal happier without them. We speak of our burdens and difficulties, our troubles and cares. How many of these are legitimate? How many of them did we find in the track

of a shining purpose, and how many have come in the pathway of some shallow ideal which had no right in our souls at all. One of Christ's greatest words is His recipe for care, "Your Father knoweth." How sweetly it falls on the ear! But dare we take it to our hearts in some of our self-created troubles? Dare we go on to apply it to our souls when we are struggling and straining to carry our self-imposed load of superfluous things or burdensome conventions. "Your Father knoweth that ye have need of all *these* things!" No! the word for such a case is more likely to be the word of the husbandman about the useless tree, "Cut it down. Why cumbereth it the ground?" That word "cumber" is indeed the very word which the Scripture uses of Martha, "She was cumbered with much serving." Apply the parable and the real danger of the tyranny of things becomes clear. Like a fruitless tree in a garden, taking up room which might have been given to something fruitful, so were Martha's troubles in the rich soil of her mind and spirit. They were draining her strength and poisoning her peace and making her life empty in pretence of filling it.

There is even more in the tyranny of things than this. It loads our own lives with cares that need never be borne, but it also makes life harder for other people. It tries to pull Mary into the stream. It creates a false standard for others. Who taught the munition girls the disastrous extravagance that made them spend their money on the fur coats and gaudy jewellery which were a load instead of an enrichment? It takes little children at school and cheapens life for them, dwarfing and cramping their souls at the very start and turning them into mal-

formed products of convention, and mean ambitions. And it intensifies the struggle for others. It is only partly true that where there is great prosperity for some, others have a share in it, picking up the crumbs from the rich man's table. The false demand for luxuries on the part of some keeps others out of their fair share of life's necessities. A civilization overloaded with luxury at the one end always has a sink of stark and debasing poverty at the other. And what creates this bitter struggle and raises this false standard is the tyranny of things over souls which have lost sight of the meaning of life in the struggle to live.

In all directions we can see the baleful hand of this tyranny. The man who judges of sin by its external consequences is under it. Lately the world has been greatly concerned about the spread of social vice. And there is grave cause for alarm. But the gravest thing in the whole campaign is the fact that we are not concerned with the sin, but with the physical results; not with the danger of moral pollution, but only with the danger of physical contamination. When we so deal with evil we are under the tyranny of things.

You can see the same tyranny in religious matters. Creeds are necessary to express our experience of God. But at the best a creed is only a thing, not the reality. The reality is our contact with God in Jesus Christ. But there are people so careful about many things in the intellectual baggage of their religious life, that they miss the living Jesus. The same is true of ritual worship—even of the sacraments. These are necessary, but they are things. They are meant to assist our spiritual vision. But how soon they begin to take up the whole field till we cannot

see the glory of our Lord for the things which are meant to reveal Him; and Christian love, which is the vital reality of our common life in His service, becomes dissipated in a quarrel about things.

Or again, there are even deeper tragedies — tragedies on a wider scale. Our civilization has seen a marvellous increase in the materials of life, but is the sum of human happiness any greater? To what has it all led? Look back a year or two. Many causes are given for the late war. The overweening ambition of one nation lit the spark. But the progress of civilization had created a machine which was too big for our moral power to direct, and it took control and smashed up. Had we not all lost sight of the real object of national prosperity, which is to serve humanity? The idols of material success had usurped the throne. The growth of wealth and inventive skill had choked out religion, and humanity without faith is like men shut in a mine; they become asphyxiated with the products of their own uninspired breath.

The warning of Christ is clearly needed, and His call is, in the first place, for a new simplicity. It is the effort to escape from the tyranny of things and find freedom, for the soul to see its way and live its own life, which has sent hermits into the desert and monks into the cloister. Their instinct is sound. If we are to be ready at God's call we must be free, and we must cultivate the spirit of detachment. For this freedom we must pay the price of self-denial, and keep a guard upon the encroachment of material things, lest in gaining the world we lose our souls. When we lose the pilgrim spirit, and forget that we

are strangers on the earth, we lose the earth itself. Only the man who is detached from the world can so use the world as to possess its real joy and satisfaction. When Garibaldi was an exile in South America, he employed his time in freeing the little republic of Rio Grande, and was successful. But he himself lived as a poor man. During his absence his wife was so reduced in circumstances that she had not even a candle to light the house at nightfall. After the campaign was over, the citizens offered the hero lands, money, rewards of all sorts. But everything he steadily refused for himself and his companions, lest it should tempt them to settle down and forget their life-task of freeing distant Italy. He refused to be enslaved by the tyranny of things and so miss the purpose of life. He would not be entangled in the shadows and miss the substance. Christ calls us all to a new grasp of the meaning of life and the things we do and possess, that the care and trouble of things may not cheat us out of joy and peace.

But there is a second call in Christ's words; it is a call to find the secret of reality. "Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." What was that good part? She was listening to His talk about life. She was penetrating through things to the *meaning* of things. She was learning what life is? Life is not in things; but in the meaning of things. Life consists in the love of beauty, not in a houseful of pictures. Life consists in knowing truth; and we may have a whole library of books and miss that real culture which is found in touch with great and living minds. Life consists in love and friendship, and we may have many fine

friends and miss the friendly spirit. As Bacon says: "Faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk is but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love." Life consists in the service of others, not in the position we hold or the wages or profits we earn. We need to get back to Christ's standard of values, back to His estimate of good and evil. The man who sees things with the eyes of Jesus is delivered from their tyranny into the management and mastery of things.

We must get back to realities, which means getting back to God, for His is the love and fellowship which breathes through all things.

What is fullness of life when you get to the root of it? It consists in the exercise of all our capacities. If there is one vital instinct which is repressed or unawakened, there is an inward strain which fills us with fretfulness. Many people carry in their breasts a conflict which they try to suppress. They pretend they are happy, but their lives give the lie to their words. That was what was wrong with Martha. She was absorbed in things, but the things did not satisfy her soul. She had a soul above mere dinners, but her soul, seeking for expression, was baffled and overloaded, till the strain within broke out in a storm of irritation and bad temper. There is something in us all which will not be satisfied with things. For you and I are not things. The root of unrest at the top and bottom of the social scale lies here. On the one hand, the soul is denied the things by which to express itself; on the other hand, it is choked in a superfluity of things like a river which is lost in mud and sand. We must find ways of living which shall liberate our souls or we are running upon disaster And most of all, we must express our instinct for God

which of all our instincts is the deepest, and realize that loving fellowship with the Father in which all life's activities find a place, for "there is no rest for us till we find our rest in Him." Life is mere wrestling in the darkness till it has yielded up its meaning in the knowledge of God's love. Then the sun rises upon us in a world which is our Father's. In his book, *The Great Hunger*, Johan Bojer tells of a young and clever engineer, with boundless ambition but without any faith, who gave himself to his profession with all his nature: "Into this world of fire and smoke and glowing iron, racing wheels and steam hammers, he thrust his way, intent on one thing—to learn, and learn, and ever learn." In time he made a fortune and retired. But he could find no peace in a country life. The steel called him, and he set to work upon an invention which baffled him. He failed, and tried again, spent all his money and kept spending, for the steel had got hold of him. His mind then began to give way. One night he imagined he saw a dim shape in his workshop which said to him, "It will do no good to pray. You may dream yourself away from these things, but you must offer yourself to them at last. You are bound fast to these things. Outside of them your soul is nothing." The tyranny of things was complete. A broken man, he crept away to a quiet spot in the hills and there he lived out his days with shattered nerves. But he found the way of peace at last. It was in giving way to a fine impulse of his soul. His child was killed by the dog of a surly neighbour who was very poor, and the father seemed to have reached the last abyss of pain. Then one night he rose up, took a bag of seed and sowed it in the neighbour's empty

field. "I went and sowed seed in my enemy's field that God might exist," he wrote to a friend. It was a strange way to put it. But he was falling back on the last reality of love and forgiveness which in the abyss had risen out of the darkness to find him. He had come back to reality and found it, not in things, but in God. Life at its deepest is love, for love is God. "When people love," says an Eastern proverb, "they dig a fountain down to God." Christ's name for the springing waters of that fountain is "eternal life."

The way to learn this secret and find this life awaking in our hearts, is to give ourselves up to Jesus. That was what Mary was doing. Listening to Him, loving Him, she was reaching contact with God. In His presence her values were changing. She was seeing life through, seeing through the surface of things—fashion and money and what men miscall the solid realities—through to the tender and loving face of God. In His presence, too, the purpose of God in Christ laid hold of her heart, and with that purpose in her soul she broke a path through all the entangling maze of things into a new world of joy and peace. She was learning from Christ that art of handling things which makes them truly ours, working for our good and making us of larger service to men. Could any but Mary have taken the costly alabaster box of ointment and seen its true value in breaking it and pouring its costly contents over the feet of Jesus? She had found escape from the tyranny of things into the possession of life.

Our deepest need to-day is to get back to Jesus and give ourselves up to Him to learn His secret. For that, we must find time to hold the door against

the tyrannous invasion of the world. Our trouble is, we have allowed the world to force its false values upon us till truth is lost in the deceit of appearances. Lately we read of an artificial pearl which has found its way on the market, deceiving the unwary. But a way was found of detecting the fraud; the X-rays showed it up—the rays that pierce through things. That is the power of Jesus. When we take our life out of the garish day and lay it open to Him, its real treasure opens up. Are we being tricked with false pearls in the market of life, or have we found the pearl of great price? Are we gaining the spiritual mind which sees through things to find God everywhere? Or are we passing through God's world without meeting with God? Then let us seek Jesus, praying the prayer, "Lord, open mine eyes that I may see"—and the tyranny of things will be lifted in a great experience, which, as Drummond says, is "like the breaking of a chain or the waking from a dream."

HOW CHRIST WINS HIS WAY

"And Zaccheus said, Behold, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken aught from any man by extortion, I restore him fourfold."

"And Jesus said, To-day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as this man also is a son of Abraham."—Luke xix. 8, 9.

THE city of Jericho is famous in Scripture for two social outcasts who found salvation there—the harlot Rahab and the publican Zaccheus. They were the last people one would have expected to reach a place in the ranks of faith. Yet Rahab's name is found in the 11th of Hebrews among the honourable company of spiritual pioneers; while Zaccheus had from the lips of Christ Himself the assurance that he had come into the Kingdom. He had Christ's own guarantee of His standing with God, "To-day is salvation come to this house."

The story of his conversion is one of the clearest illustrations of the method by which Christ wins men. It is a description of the love of God in action. The method He used throughout had His characteristic touch. It was the method of saving friendship. The great difficulty in saving and helping people is the difficulty of getting alongside. We may have a message we yearn to speak; the problem is to find men in the mood, or bring them into the mood, where they will listen. Christ's way was the method of a friendship which broke down barriers

of resistance and suspicion, and made a way for a love which was at once the messenger and the message. Men can never be brought into the Kingdom by any other power than a persuasive and winsome love which is God's only way. Oliver Wendell Holmes compares a human heart to a house with two doors—a front door and a side door. "The front door is on the street. Some keep it always open; some latched; some locked; some bolted—with a chain that will let you peep in, but never get in; and some nail it up so that nothing can pass its threshold. The front door leads into a passage and then into an ante-room. The side door opens at once into the sacred chambers. There is at least one key to this side door." Christ carried no key to the human heart but the key of loving friendship; and that is not a key at all in the sense that He will turn the lock of any man's secret soul and force an entrance. His power in point of fact is just that He has no key! His way is to knock with such appeal of truth and love to the heart of the man within, that he is won at last to unbar the door and fling it wide. Where His friendship fails, God fails. Let us be clear about it; there is no such thing as omnipotent and irresistible grace which takes a soul by storm and overwhelms it. However strong be love's persuasions, they are always persuasions, never compulsions. God's method is the love that knocks and waits and knocks again, enduring slights and rejection with a meek endurance which is love's only weapon to break the hardness of men's hearts. This story is a clear example of how Christ won His way into a man's life through all his defences and brought him into the Kingdom.

There are three stages in this story, three steps in the taking of this fortress of man's soul. Let us look at them one by one.

The first was the breach in the outer wall of indifference. Zaccheus was a publican, and that means much. He was a tax-gatherer for the Romans, who occupied the country. His business was to collect the taxes from his own people and hand them over—after deductions—to the Roman rulers, a post which could hardly be held by a man who was very sensitive to his nation's honour. He was, so to speak, working for the enemy. Besides, he did what most of such men did and took advantage of his position to screw as much out of the people as he could without regard to justice. A publican was generally a mercenary who was out to make money by fair means or by foul, one who would stick at no scruple to wring it from the flesh and blood of those who were not strong enough to resist. No doubt Zaccheus managed to square his conscience and maintain a kind of peace. I remember seeing the books of a commercial company of 300 years ago which revealed quite openly a system of petty fraud. At the foot of each page, as a kind of sop to conscience, there was written "May God forgive this little extra!" And all these things made Zaccheus a problem for Jesus.

But Zaccheus was not comfortable. That was betrayed in his curiosity which sent him climbing a tree to see Christ when He came. For one thing society was against him, and made him feel it. He could feel the very stab of their scornful eyes in his back as he walked along the street. He was not only treated as a social outcast, but as a moral

outcast who had forfeited his rights to a place in the kingdom of the faithful; and that rankled in his soul. It hurt him to the quick, and made him more of an outcast than ever. That is what all exclusiveness does. When will we learn it? These barriers which society sets up against the open sinner are a self-protecting instinct which seems legitimate enough, but they are due to fear; they are a confession of weakness. They are a sign that our goodness is not strong enough to receive the sinner, and both judge him and save him by our friendship. So we cast him out like a leper. And every one knows, who is honest, that our standards of exclusion are merely superficial. We can detect the wrong deed; we cannot detect the wrong desire. There are people entertained in society drawing-rooms whose influence is far more poisonous to society than some of those who are shut in our prisons or outcast in our streets. The only way to deal with the sinful is by a love strong enough to condemn their sin and to seek them and save them through friendship. Society will have to come to the same way of dealing with its moral outcasts as it does with its physical wreckage, which is to love them back to health.

Doubtless Zaccheus was growing outwardly harder all the time, but in his soul there was a craving for fellowship, for being counted as a man. That was what drew him to Jesus. He had heard that Christ was a friendly person whom no artificial barriers of society, nor even the repute of sin, could keep from being friendly. He had heard that Christ ate with publicans and sinners, that He was a companion of outcasts, meeting every one without pride or contempt

or any feeling of superiority. The thought struck him that perhaps Christ would be a friend to him. At least it would be good to see the kind of man who was ready to sit at everybody's table and never took any man at his face value or demanded a certificate of respectability. So the first defence—the barrier of indifference—in the soul of Zaccheus was down, and he went out to see Jesus for himself.

The second stage was the stage where Christ won His way to the inner citadel and made a conquest. Christ pursued the offensive in a great adventure of friendship. "Come down, Zaccheus, for to-day I must abide at thy house." Zaccheus was delighted, and they went home together. What they spoke about we do not know, but all the time the love of God was finding its way into his soul, making tremendous changes. We have all had the experience of being in the company of one who took us into a different world. He might be a great traveller, describing some picturesque and wonderful country across the seas. For the moment, he brought us into that world. Under his spell, our grey and commonplace surroundings filled us with discontent. It was something of that kind that happened to Zaccheus. Christ brought him for a moment into *His* world; but more, He made him realize that he belonged to it, like an exile whose blood is stirred into strange longing by pictures of home. The closer he came to Christ, the more his real self awoke in him, the more his outlook was changed. His values were altered. Money became nothing to him. All in a flash he saw something which put his wealth into its right place, made it a trust of God or else a heap of dust. He came to see his extortion

for what it was—a sin against God and man, a denial of human brotherhood, an outrage on God's children. All these thoughts began to pass through his mind, as Christ and he sat talking together. Christ had brought Zaccheus into His world, the spiritual world, because He had given him the changed mind. That is what we call conversion. It is giving a man a new mind, a new outlook which means new interests and new desires. He thinks new thoughts about God. He has a new place for duty. He has a different value for money. His attitude to others is changed. He is "renewed in the spirit of his mind" and therefore his world is changed, for our mind is the maker of our world. A man is converted when he is brought out of the selfish man's world with its false standards, its material ambitions, its hatreds and fears and prejudices towards others, into Christ's world where we look on things and deal with things and people in Christ's way. Till that new mind comes, whatever a man's emotional experience may be, he is not saved.

But there was still another step. It was the step of Zaccheus' own will. He began to live in Christ's world. He took his place there and began to settle down in it and make such changes as were needed in the life of a man who is living in this new world. "Lord," he said, "the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken aught from any man falsely, I restore him fourfold." Have we imagination enough to see what that means? Can we penetrate what was going on behind that resolution? The man was putting into effect his new valuation of money. He was looking on it as a trust. He was going to turn it into the coinage of

love, making it a channel to others of God's grace. He had found his ambition changed. He no longer sought to make money, but to serve the world "The half of my goods I give to the poor." The glory of life is not getting but giving, not grasping but sharing. He was going to take that position. A new attitude and compassion had been kindled in his soul towards the needs and sufferings of others. The poor were there not to exploit, but to serve.

And he faced up to the light which Christ cast upon his crooked life, looking the past straight in the face and determined to put it right. "If I have taken aught from any man falsely, I restore him fourfold." Fourfold was the amount a thief was required to restore if he were convicted of fraud. This man had been convicted by Christ of being a thief, a fraudulent profiteer, and he was going to stand up to it. In his great story *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne tells how a man who had wronged a woman was so torn with shame and a guilty conscience that he went out and stood in the market-place on the platform where adulterers were pilloried —that he might find peace for his soul. Zaccheus was going to do that, not in order to find peace for his soul, but *because* he had found peace for his soul. He was a thief whom Christ had turned into an honest man, and out of his new-found peace and forgiveness, in his new character, he was going to "face the music," standing in the world for what he knew himself to be so far as the world was concerned with it. For the light he had seen was love, and being seen as love, it had lost the power to terrify him. What did the world's opinion matter, when

Christ had searched his soul—in spite of everything, had forgiven him? The man who knows himself judged and forgiven by God is lifted into a world where society's verdict does not hold. Can you wonder, with this revolution wrought in this man's life, that Christ signed his passport to the Kingdom and recorded his place in the great order of the new humanity: "This day is salvation come to this house."

What was it that had saved him? Let us try to realize the power which had wrought this wonderful change. It was not some magic communication of an omnipotent grace submerging his personality, stampeding his will. The man was changed by something he had seen and grasped with his mind, and responded to with his whole being. The only magic was the magic of the Divine love which had come forth to meet him in Jesus. I do not think he had any theological explanation of it, though the whole of theology is in it. The chances are he did not recognize the change, at first, as the work of God at all. Afterwards, no doubt, he would sit down to think it over and find the real explanation, which is that he had met with God in Christ. But at first he was only conscious of a real and personal love. And there were two things about it which were clear.

1. This personal love was seeking him as an individual. Christ had picked him out and marked him down in all his need; and this love had sought him as he was, and for what he was, not because some one had spoken a good word for him, not because he was rich or in good standing, for this love condemned his illgotten riches, and he had no

standing in the eyes of his fellows any more than a lost dog of the streets. Christ had sought him for himself, just because he really loved him as a friend. That was the wonder of it! And that fact lifted him up, gave him a new reverence for his own soul. He felt as a jewel might feel which has been kicked about the dust of the streets and is found at last by its owner and set in its own place in his breast, or like a wandered child for whom no one cares, who has been found by his mother and recognized even in filth and rags, and restored to his home.

The vision of the love of God is the vision that saves us, once we have taken it in. His is a love which is personal to each one of us, seeking us as we are, and just as we are taking us into His friendship.

> He did not wait till I came to Him,
> But He took me at my worst.
> He needn't ever have died for me,
> If I could have loved Him first.

Is there one of us who doubts this personal seeking love which seeks us as we are? Do we feel the shame of our own sin so deeply that we cannot believe it? Or has the world despised us till we have accepted its verdict and sunk into the dust of self-contempt? Or have we been tempted to feel that we are just bits of flotsam and jetsam on a great uncharted ocean. Get close to Jesus; see how He sought men one by one, offering them friendship. That seeking personal love is the seeking personal love of God. All that Christ ever was, abides. *The methods of Jesus are the ways of God.* The love that shone in Him is the heart-beat of the Father.

Get close to Him. Open your eyes, and the closer you get, the more you will feel the power of that love stealing out to you and filling heaven and earth with its glory. To give yourself to that love, to what it asks of you, accepting what it offers you, is salvation.

2. But again: Zaccheus saw that love as suffering for him. He saw that the other people hated Christ for this very act. Jesus defied society in seeking Zaccheus. He had to pass through the fire of their disapproval, which flamed from their very eyes and would fain have burned Him up. Zaccheus felt their scorn, heard their slanderous whispers, "Birds of a feather flock together." He saw that Christ had taken on Himself the scorn of a society which would yet pay Him back with interest and do to Him what they would fain have done to himself. Making a friend of Zaccheus he made Himself "of no reputation." It was a love that suffered for the sake of friendship, suffered to fill *his* lonely life with love, suffered to make him an honest man. What a love it was! The more he looked on it, like Christian at the Cross, the more he wondered "till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks" in tears of penitence and gratitude. His crooked soul was shot through with a light which showed up every twist and shadow and made him shudder with loathing and shame. From that moment the past was dead, and Zaccheus was a new man living in a new world, which was lovelit and love-mastered from end to end and turned upside down.

That is the vision that saves us, breaking our hearts, and making us hate evil like nothing else on earth. The love which changes men is a

wounded love which suffers and will go through anything to save us. That is what God is—suffering Love. There is no other power that can change the world. We are hoping and longing for a revival and some people expect it to come in a great and startling revelation of Divine force. But the one thing which will bring revival is not any sudden descent of an Almighty power from heaven. It is such a new vision of God's love in Christ, seeking us through everything and suffering with us in everything, that it will awaken a response of penitence and faith rising up in a new and victorious manhood.

When Tennyson was dying, some one asked him if there was anything he wanted. "Yes," he answered faintly, "a new vision of God." A new vision of God—that is what this dying world needs. That is the secret of all resurrections and revivals. We need a new vision of God, and yet not a new vision, but the recovery of the deep, deep truth of the vision of God in Jesus which we have lost amid the drift of life and the superstitions which gather in the empty mind to take revenge upon us for our cold altars. What is the true vision of God? It has its heights and its depths—but its central fire is a love which suffers everything, and loves on, and has no power to break down our resistance but the power to suffer and endure. Let that vision sweep out the old grim thought of a punishing God who is always seeking to get even with us for our sins. Where shall we see it? We can see it everywhere if we have the eyes to look. Three years ago the earth was scarred and torn with the wounding of man's hatred. To-day the scarred lands are green with beauty and decked with flowers. Is there no love

there? One of our modern poets finds in those fresh springing flowers a forgiveness which is with such unplumbed depths of loving almost too awful to receive.

> I could not face
> The scourge of God's forgiveness! I could bear,
> Amid the world's red guilt and black despair,
> Thy wrath, I cried, but not Thy mercy, Lord.
> O spare me from the year's unfolding grace,
> For every flower is a two-edged sword.

But if you want to see it clearest, you must go to Calvary. You must see it in that Friend who came seeking men, and whom they called a traitor and made an outcast, and numbered Him with the criminals, and smote him with their blustering hatred; yet could not destroy His friendship. He rose from the grave to love men still.

Are you waiting for God's power to take you by storm with the grip of an almighty force? He has no other might with which to win you but the power of loving. But that suffering love is His omnipotence. It is the final, irresistible thing.

Are there some who see this love, but fear to step into the great friendship to which it calls us; fear the change, fear the righting of the wrong, perhaps; fear the service to which it calls; fear the new life because of some weakness which like an old wound may find us out and bring us down in shame? A Mohammedan once put the difficulty thus, "Jesus of Nazareth invites me, but I need the power to live in His world." It is good if you fear it, for it means that you take it seriously. No man has seen the love of Christ who has not seen its terrible relentlessness toward selfishness and sin. There was no fear in Zaccheus. He was confident

that he was going to be able to live in this new world. And why? Because he knew that this Friend was with him. In His presence he felt, as Paul felt, equal to anything, and he knew that in this friendship he had found something which was eternal. That makes all the difference. The friendship of Christ is no fairy light which shoots up in our souls for a moment and is gone, leaving life darker than before, luring us into a world in which it is impossible to live. His love is the revelation of the abiding reality, the final fact of the universe. In His love, there is the power of infinite victory so long as we keep bringing our lives, with their temptation and difficulty, ever and again into His presence and open to the searching and the guiding of His love.

Perhaps we made an acquaintance once with an interesting and clever person—a man, it may be, with a fine mind and a high outlook. For the moment our life was quickened and lit with glorious possibility as by a beam of sunlight in a cloudy day. But the stranger passed on his way, leaving only a lingering trail of brightness in the memory. *Jesus Christ abides.* That friendship is eternal. The love that brings us into the Kingdom can keep us there. The Friend who lifts us into His world can give us power to live in it.

> One Friend in thy path shall be
> To secure thy step from wrong,
> One to count night day for thee
> Patient through the watches long,
> Serving most with none to see.

His name is Jesus. Will you trust that Friend? To-day He says, "I would fain abide at thy house." Answer Him, "Even so; come, Lord Jesus?"

MASTERLESS MEN

"And about the eleventh hour He went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto Him, Because no man hath hired us."—Matt. xx. 6.

IT is a standing rule with the parables of Jesus that we must not stretch their meaning beyond the point they were meant to illustrate. Yet such was the genius of Christ that there is hardly a parable of His but in phrase after phrase illuminates with unerring insight some tract of life and shows us how it looks under the light of God. This Parable of the Vineyard is a case in point. It was meant to set forth how God rewards our work, not according to the surface measure of its amount, but according to the secret standards of grace, taking into consideration all sorts of things, which

> the world's coarse thumb
> And finger failed to plumb,
> So passed in making up the main account.

Yet as Christ passes on to this conclusion, He illuminates, by the way, what must be to-day a burning question for every honest Christian mind. It is the great number of those who stand outside the Kingdom of Christ who have never been won by Christ or by any great spiritual loyalty. Make of it what we will, these people form a large and

increasing section of our population to-day. They own no ideal, though they may have one which they serve unconsciously, and they stand aloof from Christ in a bitter hostility or a tragic indifference. In feudal days most of the men of the country were attached to the great barons to whom they had sworn their service in return for certain rights. But there was always a number who had no such allegiance—masterless men they were called. They roved here and there at their own free will, doing what they liked, attaching themselves to this or that master for a time, as expediency demanded. Countless people to-day from the spiritual point of view might be described as masterless men. They may dabble in theosophy, or have an interest in spiritualism or other forms of the occult. They may have a few cut-and-dry formulas by which they claim to rule their lives, such as doing the best they can and letting the future take care of itself; or, as one prominent man described his—getting as much happiness out of life as he could without interfering too much with the happiness of other people. But for the most part there is no fixed light within, no definite ideal, and, above all, no sense of a leader in life's journey, a captain in the fight. They are masterless men.

This fact explains many of the sinister things in the public and private life of to-day. Why do many people begin to drift downward when home ties are broken? The reason is they have no inward loyalty of their own. They have been living upon second-hand inspirations. Such virtue as they had, has been a dependent thing propped up by the scaffolding of others' example or influence, and when the ties were

broken the building went down like a house of cards. This masterless condition is the sinister thing in our social and industrial life. The masterless man is liable to be caught by the passion of the moment, to become the slave of a catchword, to follow the biggest crowd and become the tool of the mob spirit. It is these masterless men who have brought Russia to her fate to-day. When the hand of the autocrat was suddenly cast off, they found their opportunity before the mass of the people had time to think things out, and for the moment they are giving the land over to pillage and massacre. It is the masterless men who are the standing danger of every democracy.

Why is it that after so many years of enlightenment and especially of Christian teaching, so many have not been won for any definite Christian ideal? Why is it that Christ has not got them? Why do they still stand outside the Kingdom and defy Christ, or at least ignore Him? That is the question which the parable asks. The answer is striking; it sends a shaft of light into a very dark place and brings us face to face with one or two salutary truths. "They say unto Him, Because no man hath hired us."

One thing is clear. The reason does not lie in the nature of the men themselves. These men outside the vineyard were all men who might have been inside, if only they had been asked. They would have been valuable. They had it in them. Christ gives no colour to any idea that some people are by nature capable of appreciating His message and being won by His appeal, and others are not. No man is exiled from God by any disqualification of nature. The truth lies all the other

way. As John Masefield puts it on the lips of the Widow in the Bye Street speaking a last word to her prodigal son:

> God dropped a spark down into every one,
> And if we find and fan it to a blaze
> It'll spring up and glow like—like the sun,
> And light the wandering out of stony ways.

No one can fail to feel that there is a vast amount of splendid human material going to waste, because it has not been captured for the Kingdom of God. Who can read of the kind of manhood revealed by war, its heroism, its sacrifice, its amazing loyalty, without feeling cut to the heart that so many of these have not been won for Christ? It is not enough to say that it is sin which keeps so many out. That is merely to evade the point. For much of the sin that shocks and saddens us, is but the result of this masterless condition. It comes from an empty mind, an untenanted soul, which inevitably goes to ruin like an unoccupied house. There are sins whose very strength is drawn from fine loyalties which should have been Christ's, but have been captured by the seven devils. Why stand they all the day idle? Let us face the answer: "Because no man hath hired us."

The first conclusion which suggests itself is that they have never had the call. This is the simplest answer. May it not be true? How little there is of the spiritual note, let alone the definitely Christian note, in the appeals made to the masses and classes in our country by many of our leaders. A little reflection will remind us. The note of patriotism has been sounded often enough during these last

years, and the appeal to fear. Many of our leaders show little trust in the power of anything deeper than these, when they address the people in a crisis. Indeed it is often an even more selfish chord which is struck—the appeal to personal advantage, to the pocket, to mere selfishness, and settlements have been grudgingly made on that basis and the crisis just tided over, when a deeper appeal—the appeal to the highest — might have awakened an overwhelming response. I do not stay to ask the reason why this lower note is so persistently sounded. It betrays a lack of faith in goodness which is a confession of spiritual bankruptcy; or a cynical measure of man's nature which is a denial of the vision of Jesus. One cannot help feeling that masses of our people are derelict to-day because they have never been reached by any breath of higher inspiration. We have not got them for the highest, because we have systematically approached them on the lower side of their nature. No man hath hired them.

Or think of Christian preaching. One would imagine there had been plenty of that, and there are many who tell us cynically that there is too much of it. But is this true? How many thousands are there who pass our church doors without the faintest idea of what the Church stands for, and what the message of the evangel really is, because they have never heard it? They hardly know the name of Christ, except as an echo from a distant Sunday School. As a writer says: "The tragic thing is not that men knowing what Christianity is, will reject it. It is that not knowing what it is, they will have nothing to do with it." There is abundant ground for asking ourselves, whether the Church of to-day is not failing in

the mission of the evangel toward large masses of our people. If they will not come to us, we must go to them. What we need to-day is a gigantic Crusade, a new and widespread proclamation of the evangel. Why is it that we do not have it? Is it that we are losing the evangelical note, the authentic note of the gospel? Has the gift of Christ to ourselves lost its wonder and its power? Have we lost the passion for souls? Are we losing sight of the tragedy of sin? Is the inward fire dying down? We cannot all be preachers, but do we not need to follow Christ in so loving men that we shall love them into the Kingdom, seeking doors of friendship and social fellowship through which we shall be ready to enter with a message? Surely the Kingdom of God is something to talk about when the way is open—far more worth talking about than the thousand and one topics of ordinary conversation. Above all, the way is clear to-day for a great campaign up and down the land; for a combined assault upon the strongholds of sin and unbelief in the name of Christ. There are signs that we are beginning to realize it. The world is waiting for it with a pathetic wistfulness. It is watching for some message, like those who look for the dawn after a night of weariness and futile wandering.

But there is more. We need the authentic note in our Christian *lives*. I speak to Christian people. Has there been any appeal in our lives for Christ, anything that would strike through the crust of indifference and make men wonder? If we were to ask some of those who stand outside, would they not be apt to reply that there is nothing in the lives of many Christian people which really attracts them,

nothing extraordinary, nothing which speaks of God. It is a common claim by many who stand outside that their lives are just as full of Christian quality as the lives of most Christian people. We need not stay to argue the point or to discover the secret source of what the Spectator calls "godless goodness." All goodness is of God, though it may not be conscious of God. But surely in this claim there is the demand that somehow there ought to be a difference in our goodness, some lustrous quality which is able to reveal to men's dull minds the face of God. Walter Pater, in one of his books, tells of a Roman lad who was attracted to a young Roman soldier of his chance acquaintance because of a certain something in his life which drew him strangely and touched a deep chord in his soul. He found it difficult to explain. It was like a fragrance, a delicate perfume. It was like the shining of a very beautiful light. It touched and moved his very soul. It made him wonder. As they drew close together he asked what it was, and he found that this soldier lad was a Christian and bit by bit, in spite of his superstition, he was drawn toward Christ—drawn by that accent of Christian character which called to him as deep calls to deep. Is there that accent in our lives which makes men wonder, that gleam of a better country which lays them open to the appeal of Christ? Or is our Christianity a mere convention, a system of negations, mere criticism of other men's pleasures, and not the welcome to a fellowship and a service in which to find life completed and glorified with richer meaning and joy. What we need to-day is to stop living on an old tradition of what it means to be a Christian. We need to rediscover Christ for to-day

and to recover Christianity out of the mass of traditions and conventions which have hidden its real nature. There was a time when it meant going into a monastery and shutting oneself off from many fine and noble things, because that was the only effective protest which men who wanted to live for Christ could make against the profligacy and sin of their age; but it does not mean that to-day. There was a time when it meant going out to the hills to worship, and being hunted and harried for the sake of spiritual freedom; but it does not mean that to-day. We have got to find out what it means to be a Christian man or woman in this age in which we live, with all our pressing problems. What kind of men would Christ have us to be to-day? What kind of life does He demand? That is what we have to discover. We can be sure it is something so strong, so fine, so heroic, so tender, that it would win hundreds of those who stand aloof because they have never been touched by the note of the authentic Christian spirit —the note that sings like music and challenges like a battle cry. "Why stand they all the day idle? Because no man hath hired them."

But there are those who have never been won for Christ, because they have not realized there was anything they could do in the vineyard. Perhaps they did not know the Kingdom of God, into which He was calling them, *was* a vineyard. They had imagined perhaps, it was only a fold, a place of shelter from the storms of life. It is quite true that is a picture Christ gives of the Kingdom. The picture of the Good Shepherd and the sheep, has many tender and welcome suggestions. It speaks of rest and peace, of pleasant pastures and still

waters; and when the soul is storm-beaten and weary with the struggle of life, or torn and bleeding in the thickets of perplexing temptations, that is an infinitely comforting picture which reveals the Shepherd who folds us safely in His keeping and binds up the wounded and broken-hearted. But it is not the whole truth of the gospel. There is a way of reading Christ's message so as to suggest that He came into the world to lead a host of spiritual cripples safely to a better land. We have to take other pictures if we are to have it complete. He is a leader of infinite variety of appeal. And His call is not always to the softer side of our nature, to its invalidism and its fears. He appeals to our strength. The Kingdom is a vineyard, a place of work, a field of battle. He is a Master who has made a world in which He wants things done, wants it redeemed from waste and wildness, built up, made perfect. "Why stand ye here all the day idle?"

Professor Gilbert Murray, discussing in a pamphlet what it was that sent so many of our young men out to the front at the beginning of the war, and sent them so gaily, so buoyantly, gives this answer: that for the average man to find something to do which he *can* do, and spend his whole life in doing, is the secret of a very high happiness. Christ holds the key to that happiness. The final secret of a satisfying life is in Jesus. He wants something done which we can all do, and into which we can put every ounce of our being. He wants the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of righteousness and purity and love brought into being *by us*. And the Kingdom can be realized in and through the relationships of ordinary life, and the work and business of ordinary days.

That is where many people miss the point of Christianity. Religion is not a special compartment of our activities. Religion is life taken up into the fellowship of God. Christianity demands no special gifts. The qualities that make a man a good husband, a good father, a faithful workman, an honest merchant, a true friend, are the qualities which equip us for the service of God. There are, of course, special means which have to be used for bringing in the Kingdom. There is special work that wants doing —work among the children, for instance—and it needs the best men and women to do it. There is no finer soil for growing the seed of the Kingdom, than the mass of young life which is rising all around us. The hope of the new world lies there, at what George Meredith calls "the malleable moment." And there is the work of preaching, which is all the more needed if it have fallen into something of disfavour. Or look farther afield, and what of the task of the Christian evangel in foreign lands, where great multitudes are reaching undreamed-of power without the faith to direct it for the good of the world or their own?

But that is only a part of the sphere of Christian service. Christ came to inaugurate a service of God which shall be as wide as the whole range of healthy human activities and to enable us to go out on the daily round, the common task, and capture these for God. He bids us go out and build up the Kingdom all about us; in every home, in every business; to transform every relationship with His Spirit. He says to every man who goes out in the morning to his task, "Go, work to-day in My vineyard." We were told again and again in the

days of war, that all service which is clean is national service. We need that outlook in our Christian lives. All service is Christian service if it be done for Him.

The voice of Christ has new urgency to-day, when the foundations of the old world are rocking and old prejudices are being broken down. He is calling for volunteers to step in and claim this No Man's Land for *Him* while it is still unclaimed.

Sin worketh, let me work too.
Sin undoeth, let me do.
Busy as sin, my work I ply,
Till I rest in the rest of eternity.

Death worketh, let me work too.
Death undoeth, let me do.
Busy as death my work I ply,
Till I rest in the rest of eternity.

The one vital question for every man is the question how he is going to make his contribution to life. What are we going to put into life to leave the world better than we found it? There is an idea that progress is a kind of stream which moves onward and upward by some secret tendency of good which is independent of ourselves, and we have only to swim with the stream to find ourselves farther on. The war has killed that idea, let us hope, for ever, a stream can never move upward of itself. God's only way of breaking into life is by coming into our hearts. His only way of moving the world is by moving men. The power of all progress is in *our wills* given up to work the will of God wherever we are situated. The dynamic of progress is victorious personality. The greatest contribution we can make to life is just ourselves, redeemed and vitalized by the

touch of Jesus. The Kingdom grows, in the measure in which each one of us individually lives in the order of sonship to God through all life's traffic and business. What kind of personality are we carrying into the world from day to day? That is the vital question. Stevenson's biographer sums up his life by saying, "To do the work he did was a great achievement, but to be the man he was, was an achievement no less great." That is the point. Whatever our work, the manhood we reach is always our greatest achievement. And the secret of true manhood is the mastery of Jesus.

Perhaps there are some who stand idle to-day because they have never recognized the voice of Christ. The voice is powerless because it is to them unreal. At best it is second-hand; and a leader whose personality never touches the lives of his men wins no allegiance. As Napoleon put it, "When I was in my prime I could get thousands to follow me, but I had to be *there*." It is the personal touch that does it. And perhaps you cannot feel that Christ comes near you with a personal touch upon your life. It seems all unreal—this appeal—an echo from distant centuries which does not reach the heart to-day. But are you sure that you have listened for it? If there is anything in the Gospels, it is a message of a living Christ—a Christ who is with men—the same to-day as yesterday, in closer touch even than when He walked with His disciples in Galilee. The essence of the resurrection is that Christ has been liberated from the bonds of space and time to become an ever-present Master.

That is what He meant when He told the disciples that He was going away. "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Spirit will

not come unto you; but if I go away, I will send Him unto you." He meant this amazing thing: that if He were to be able to be with them always, and with each one of them, He would have to go away, so that His Spirit might be free. And they learned afterwards when He was really gone, that it was true. Peter and John were as sure that Christ was with them then, as when He was with them in the flesh. And He is here to-day. Time does not limit Him. Space does not confine Him. *He is here.* Have you ever gone away to listen for His voice, to give Him a chance to meet you? In the midst of the cannon roar the larks were singing, but you could not hear them till you trained your ear and listened in the intervals for the sweet shrill note. Have we ever gone away to listen for the spiritual voice of Christ? Have we ever cultivated that inner ear "which is the bliss of solitude," with which Wordsworth listened to the voice of nature? How does Christ speak to-day? Not by a voice we can hear with the outward ear, though some have claimed to hear Him speak as vividly as the speech of a friend at their elbow. There was Paul, for instance, and St. Francis, and Joan of Arc who died rather than disown the voices she was sure were divine These heard it so, because their spiritual natures were keyed up to a pitch at which spiritual voices become more real than earthly realities and spiritual visions more vivid than the light of day.

How does Christ speak? He speaks within, in the shame that touches conscience, in the remorse that follows sin, in the ideals which attract us like the stars, in the great words of truth which once fell from His lips and which to-day strike home to our

souls with an authority and power we cannot deny. He speaks in the wrongs that touch our chivalry, in the causes which call for our help, in the broken-hearted whom we long to heal. He speaks in the desperate longing for a higher life and a finer world to live in —a world which calls to us to-day from the very horror and ruin of our war-worn earth. How is it that these things awaken in us such feelings and make such appeals? Why is it that these impulses haunt us so that we cannot get rid of them? Read the New Testament and you will find them incarnate in Christ, so that the more you think of Him the stronger do they become. And when you give yourself up to them there will steal in upon you the feeling that He is with you, a Comrade, a Friend. And that feeling will deepen into knowledge and conviction. It is this fellowship with a present Christ which keeps Christianity alive. It is a message ever renewed to us by One who speaks from heart to heart, and who is Himself "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." To listen for that message is to feel a new life taking possession of our nature and rising within us—a life which He begins to live in us and we begin to live through Him.

THE MYSTERY OF TEMPTATION

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."—Matt. vi. 13.

It is not surprising that in His great prayer Christ should have included a petition about temptation. "No man," says William James, "has matriculated in the university of life till he has been well tempted." We do not go very far along the road before we are faced with suggestions of evil which make appeal to something in our nature. It is part of the genius of the Bible, born of a sure insight into life, and won out of sad experience, that the first thing that happens to a man when he steps upon the stage of the world is a great temptation. The peace of the Eden garden is broken by the insinuating serpent with his subtle suggestion to sin. That is one of the best pictures of temptation in all literature. All the elements of temptation are there—the call of appetite, the appeal to curiosity, the deceitful glamour with which we are self-blinded to the nature of evil. Put a man where you will, you cannot shut out the voice of temptation. Make his circumstances as favourable to purity and goodness as they can be made, he cannot escape the choice which is our peril. The voice which makes the lower appeal may awake spontaneously in our own souls in face of the suggestions of the world

around us; or it may come in the persuasions of some real or fancied friend. Many a man has been tempted by the foolish fondness of those who loved him best, making it doubly hard for him to resist.

But however it come, temptation is a power to be reckoned with. It is the one thing a mother fears for her boy when he goes out into the world. She does not fear open sin without disguise, for that would only disgust a fine nature; she fears the sin which comes in the glamour of temptation. Every man has need to treat his temptations with respect.

How is it that this force comes into our life? Why has our path been so beset with these traps of the devil's baiting? How did the serpent get into the garden? It is a great mystery and we naturally expect from our Lord some help in penetrating it. But when we turn to this prayer, "Lead us not into temptation," we are perplexed. For the mystery deepens. The suggestion seems to be that it is God who leads us into temptation, making the world such a place that temptation is inevitable. Surely it is unthinkable that the drunkard who goes down before his passion, should have been sent into that fiery furnace by God Himself. Surely it cannot be that God weaves this glamour about our sins so that they hypnotize conscience into sleep and work their will upon us. If this were so, it would be little wonder that some cry out upon such a God and disclaim responsibility for evil.

> Oh, Thou who dost with pitfall and with gin
> Beset the road I have to wander in,
> Thou wilt not with predestination round
> Enmesh me and impute my fall to sin.

There is a mystery here which adds to the confusion of our tempted souls. We are faced by a great dilemma. Is God responsible for our temptations? Is it God who sends us out to meet them? If it be God who sends us to meet them, then surely there must be something good in temptation; but if there be something good in temptation, why should Christ teach us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation"?

The way to clear up many of these difficulties is very simple. It is to get a clear grasp of one fact—the fact that there is no sin in being tempted. "'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus, another thing to fall." There is no sin in temptation in itself. No man, as Spurgeon said, can keep the birds of passion from flying about his head; the trouble is when he allows them to begin building nests in his hair! The sin is when we begin to give way to temptation, to dally with it, to give it a chance to find a lodgment in our thoughts and imaginations till it gets power to master us in the secret places of our being. There must be many people to whom that simple thought will bring relief. You have been meeting a temptation continually which shames you even to think of, and you are haunted by the suggestion that you are more or less of a sinner because you have it at all. Part of its strength indeed may have been drawn from your own nature, because you have allowed it to master you in the past, like the camel in the legend which poked its nose into the tent, then its head, then its whole body, and finally turned on the man and crowded him out. It may be that the evil thing has got right inside and is meeting us day and night because once we gave it lodgment

there. As Oliver Wendell Holmes says, a drunkard's temptation may be his punishment. It may come to him as the vengeance of life upon an empty mind because he has not taken measures to keep his nature in control. He may have contracted the habit whose grip upon him becomes his temptation. But let us get hold of the fact in spite of this, that there is no sin in being tempted. Temptation may be a consequence of sin ; it is not the sin itself. The sin is when we consent to it and give way to it.

What then, is temptation? There are two parts in it. There is first of all some impulse or suggestion which we know to be evil. It may come in the voice of our own passions, the suggestion of the natural appetites and desires of the body threatening to take control. It may come in some suggestion of selfishness, bidding us seek things for ourselves in defiance of the needs and claims of others. It may come in the voice of fear, the fear of suffering, or the scorn of our friends suggesting to us escape by a lower way of living, or by some compromise with evil.

But there is another element in temptation. There is God's part in it—the voice of our better self. God is in every temptation challenging us to fight, warning us that the thing is wrong. There would be no temptation if there were no voice of God, for we would not be conscious of any dilemma. Some people have so suppressed the voice of God in the inward challenge of their souls that they never hear it. These people are never really tempted. There is no glint of fight in them. They are enslaved, the bondsmen of vice and dishonesty, whose sin has become second nature. They have given themselves over, body and soul, to the devil—automatic sinners whose

vice is as mechanical as a wound-up clock. God help the man who has sunk to that depth!

Temptation has God in it—His challenge to fight the evil, His call to build up a character out of the crude passions and impulses with which our nature is equipped, His crusade to slay some dragon where it steps across the frontiers of our life, and challenges the rule of some high purpose. God's appeal is to choose the highest in a world where we are free to do either good or evil. For our freedom is the basis of our temptation. It is because we are free, we are tempted. If there were no freedom, there would be no temptation. And without freedom, there would be no value in goodness, thus we cannot become strong men without temptation. Even Christ had His temptations, which were very real. His battle was no mere panorama set out for our instruction like a shadow-piece upon a screen. Some people read the Gospels as if the temptation scenes were merely a play in which Christ was acting a part. But His temptations were real because there was something He could not be without passing through that fire. He had to reach character as we reach it. He had to choose between the higher and the lower way, and when the lower way rose before Him it had a glamour of its own, drawn though it was from His pity for men. He was tempted like as we are, yet without sin; and through that temptation He won the power to become our spiritual leader and the helper of all tempted men.

Why then, if temptation be the way of strength and the opportunity of our manhood, did Christ pray, "Lead us not into temptation"? Some temptations come through our very vitality of body: is a man to

pray for a weak body lest his vitality should break out in ungovernable passion? Some temptations come through our friendship: is a man to shun love and all its tender guiding because he may be tempted to be a shirker, or desert his post? Some temptations come through a high position or a great success: is a man to pray for a humble position lest he should be tempted to pride? The answer lies on the face of the question. To pray for a life without temptation is to pray for a life that is no life at all. "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies forth and seeks her adversary, but slinks out of the conflict where that immortal garland is to be fought for, not without dust and heat." So wrote John Milton in words that echo the Spirit of Christ.

For Christ was a man of the open air. He never shirked the offer of life whatever it might bring. And he never expected His disciples to shirk life because there might be poison in it, or shelter themselves in a dug-out all their days because there might be bullets in the air. The end He was out for, was the will of God, the life God would have Him live. It mattered not what devils lay in the path or what siren voices might call, He would go—and He would have us go.

Why then should He pray, "Lead us not into temptation"? The secret is that this is the expression of a shudder in the soul without which we are not safe from temptation. There is a sensitive plant which shrinks from the most delicate contact and shrivels up at the slightest approach of anything that might hurt its life. That is what a man's soul ought to be in the face of evil wherever it meets him. No

man is safe from the contamination of evil without that armour of the sensitive spirit. The Christian man is a "Happy Warrior" who never shrinks from duty or from life, or lets danger cast a shadow over his spirit or spoil his joy, but he goes into life with his soul *on guard*. Christ is not advocating in this prayer the fear of life. He is warning us to be afraid of sin. That fear is the only fear which should have any real place in a strong man's heart. That fear Christ is seeking to set up as a sentinel in our soul. Temptation is not a thing to make us shirk the way of a virile and vigorous life; but it is not a thing to meet with a swagger, much less is it a thing to *go* out to meet. The man who deliberately walks into temptation which he might avoid, is imperilling his soul. That is the outlook of this prayer. There are temptations that put an illegitimate strain upon the grace of God. Moral conflicts come to us all in the path of life and try us to the very soul. But God keep us all from meeting these without a certain trembling and a certain fear which will creep into our prayer, "Lead us not into temptation."

Christ does not, however, stop with this clause of the prayer. If it is God's will that we should go into the place of moral conflict, it is our business to face it. So Christ concentrates on the main part of our business, which is the way through. "Deliver us from the evil." This petition in itself brings encouragement. It means that deliverance is possible. God never yet allowed any man to be put into a position where there was no alternative but to sin. No man was ever yet born into the world, dark as some of its circumstances are, foredoomed to moral disaster. There is a limit to the power of temptation;

that limit is the grace of God. What is the way of deliverance? This prayer suggests it. It is to be delivered from the evil. And where is the evil? It is not in the materials of our life—the tempting things. It is in our own wills. The wrong desire which would make of something in God's world an instrument of selfishness or passion, is the secret of our temptation. And the way of deliverance is the release from the grip of the base desire which uses the very strength of our own nature and the very gifts of God to lead us into the wilderness.

And how can we be delivered from the base desire? The key to desire is interest, and interest is awakened by attention. The will follows in the track of the wind of desire, as this is awakened by the things to which we give our mind. This is where prayer helps us. Prayer, in the first place, is fixing our thoughts upon God. The moment the mind is opened up to Jesus Christ and kept open to Him, the whole situation becomes victoriously changed, His presence fills the field of our conscious mind, dominates our outlook and influences our will. As Mark Rutherford put it, "Time and again I have known moments of temptation, when I would have gone under, but the pure, calm, heroic image of Christ confronted me, and I succeeded."

We can trace two consequences of that Divine invasion.

1. The tempting thing loses its attraction. The spell is broken which held our will in its fatal hypnotic grip. The glamour passes from the evil thing, whatever it be, as the tinselled glory of a gaudy room is gone when you let in the daylight and all its tawdriness appears. The whole outlook is changed.

No man can see sin in its reality till he has seen it in the light of Christ, and the moment he sees it there its ugliness is plain. The thing which makes us shudder at sin, and on the other hand draws us to goodness, is no mystic influx of supernatural power. It is the simple power that comes from seeing things as they are. No man with any of the Divine nature left in him, can see evil unmasked and not hate it. Its power over us is the artificial glamour which is cast around it by our own insincere dealing with ourselves, and sin's way of blinding our eyes. William James says that a drunkard never drinks with the thought in his own mind that he is a drunkard. He drinks because he is hot or cold, or because he is depressed or joyful, to help him out of his trouble, or to make him a sociable being; so his mind weaves a fancy dress round the tempting thing which conceals its real nature. The more he realized himself a drunkard, James means, the more he would find himself free, loosed from his bonds by the sword-edge of reality. Men go down before a big temptation because they meet it only in the stifling air of their own shuttered souls. Open the windows when you are tempted and let in the light of Christ and the bracing breath of His purity! The longer we dally with the thought of evil, the more it gets a strangle-hold upon us. The only way to break the spell is by fleeing from it into the presence of Christ. And the method of that saving flight is the way of prayer.

2. This concentration on Christ delivers us from evil by rallying in our souls new reserves of moral purpose and purity. A soul-compelling thought of Christ has the power to organize the forces of our

better nature for resistance to evil. Many things increase the power of our personality. A great love will do it, or a great purpose which fires the imagination. That is how some weak men have done strenuous work in the world, and braved incredible hardships which would have beaten many a stronger man. For half his life Nelson was ailing, often sick, with only one eye and one arm, but he was possessed by a great patriotism, and his personality became a fountain of marvellous energy and courage so that he could stand up to any situation. But nothing can increase the power of our personality like faith in Jesus Christ. He can unlock the secret chambers of moral power. He can awaken every noble impulse to stand up against evil, and bring all our reserves into action. When a man prays this prayer he brings Christ into his life, and at His touch all his better nature is quickened.

There is an incident in *John Inglesant* which illustrates this great deliverance. He found himself shut up with a great temptation through the scheming of an enemy. A poisonous mist seemed to fill the air and deaden all finer feeling, when suddenly there came a rustling breeze which seemed to him like a whisper of heaven reminding him of his better self. Memory began to awake. The life of other days streamed back into his mind, "the sacramental Sundays, the repeated vows," the light of heaven he had once seen, the chapel at home. Under the power of such thoughts "the reason and affections rallied together, and, trained into efficiency by past discipline, regained the mastery." He was like the demon-haunted child in the gospel story, and, as in that story, the demon was expelled. The writer of

the novel writes down the conclusion. "It is not so easy to ruin him with whom the touch of Christ still lingers in the palm." All this has happened to countless souls and can happen again to any man who, in the evil hour, will lift his soul into the presence of God and pray, "Deliver us from the evil."

But one thing we must be clear about. We cannot expect the Divine deliverance save as we are yielding life up to the Divine purpose. There are people who, in their better moments when sin comes back to take its toll of remorse, loathe the evil which laid them low, and long to be free from it. They give themselves to prayer, but all seems unavailing. Again and again some ugly passion returns. They spend their days in alternate defeat and poignant regret till, it may be, they give up praying altogether and surrender themselves to a lower way of living at the expense of a deadened conscience. The secret of their failure is clear. They are not wholly surrendered to the purpose of God. They do not pray, "Thy will be done," and "Thy kingdom come" at the same time as they pray, "Deliver us from the evil." They are really seeking to exploit the resources of God in the interests of a selfish life. They merely want a self-respect which will enable them to be just in their own eyes and hold up their heads before the accusing voice of their own souls. It is not righteousness they are after, but only self-righteousness. They are not asking to be made strong and clean for the sake of the Kingdom, but only for the sake of their own health or reputation. There is only one way to a great salvation, only one way in which we can be delivered from evil. It is by losing all thought of

self in seeking the purpose of Jesus. God mends no lives for people to further their own ends. We must learn to pray the whole Lord's Prayer and live in the spirit of it, before we can expect any one of its petitions to be answered. Only in the channels of Christ's great service can our nature find escape from evil, by being delivered into goodness. Victory over sin is a by-product of the life which is caught up into Christ's great love. Seeking to help others we find deliverance for ourselves. Flinging ourselves into Christ's crusade against evil, we escape from the power of it. The strength which wrecks men in passion becomes the means of life's power and enrichment, when the will is harnessed to Christ's tasks. His recipe for victory over passion is the same as for victory over fear and care, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you."

THE DUTY OF HOLDING TOGETHER

"And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved."—Acts xxvii. 30, 31.

IN short compass, this is one of the most fascinating of sea stories. It is the only place in the Bible where the seamanship of those days is described in detail. The story has the note of personal experience. It had evidently made an indelible mark on the man who wrote it. We can see the desperate efforts of the crew to avert disaster. We can hear the rush and roar of the tempest. We can picture the wild confusion and panic, and the dastardly attempt of the sailors to save their own skins and leave the ship and passengers to their fate. The traditions of seamanship have changed since then—our own nation has led the way. The story of our mercantile marine in the years of war is a record of selfless devotion which will never die. It is a sailor's business—and he never dreams now of anything else—to stand by the ship till the whole company is safe. That is the heroic law of the sea.

This story has several suggestive things to say to us who live on land, as well as to those who go down to the sea in ships. It has very interesting parallels with our life—with our present situation. A ship is like a State. It is a little republic, a miniature nation.

It is a self-contained community with its own laws and regulations. Every member of the company is responsible to some extent for the safety of the whole ship on her voyage from port to port. The parallel teems with suggestions for our life together. We frequently speak of the "ship of State." "The ocean of life" is a hackneyed phrase which lives because of its truth.

And the paramount duty that faces a ship's company is to hold together. It is this duty of which I want you to think—the social duty that meets us on every side of life where we come into relations with one another—the duty of co-operative living and co-operative service. Except we hold together, we cannot be saved.

This duty becomes clear when we consider the basis on which we live our life. Paul put it strongly, later on, in connection with the Church. "We are members one of another," he said. The moment a man or woman comes into the Christian Church, he is in vital contact with others whose lives begin to influence him, and are in turn influenced by him. No man or woman, for instance, comes into a worshipping congregation, without bringing a certain mood or spirit into the atmosphere which affects the devotion of all the rest. Some people will be better because *we* are in the spirit of prayer. Some one is being helped into a new view of life from their very contact with us. Or it may be some one will be weaker, poorer, more deaf to life's music because our spirit is out of tune, or because we have brought a cynical mood into the house of God or depressed the atmosphere with some chilling discouragement—"for we are members one of another."

But our dependence upon one another is not merely a fact of our religious intimacy. It is the basic fact of life. We sometimes speak of an isolated individual; there is no such person. You do not describe a man fully by telling all that can be seen about his outward life; you must know his home, his friends, the whole environment of his personal relationships. Our life is a social unity in which we are bound together below the surface, like the tangled roots of forest trees. And this dependence has an even wider range than our home-circle or acquaintanceships. It takes in the whole world. The bread we eat was grown on the plains of America and made by some one we never saw. The clothes we wear have passed through countless hands in a chain that may stretch across the world. The whole earth gathers about our doorstep to minister to our comfort and our pleasure. The ship's company did not realize how close was their dependence, till the storm arose and Paul saw and pointed it out; and we never know how deeply our lives are knit together till some industrial or national catastrophe disorganizes our life. A strike in a vital industry brings the whole machine to a standstill and homes are fireless and there is never a street without women and children feeling the pinch of hunger. One of the useful things which a great trade stoppage does for us, is to make us think. Our temptation is not to think at all of these things, till comfort is touched and conscience awakes and we realize that we belong to a social unit for whose welfare each one shares responsibility. The same thing came home to us during the war, when an assassin's hand in Central Europe struck at the heart of the world and made it bleed

with a wound from which it will take years to recover, and will leave its scars for generations. The world is one big family. Every day it is being linked the closer. The great inventors are still concentrating on the problem of annihilating distance and making the world one neighbourhood. More and more, commerce and science are making men and nations like a ship's company, who are out together on the same voyage. Everything is driving home the conclusion that we must hold together if we are to get through.

For this very nearness has two great consequences. It has its *dangers*. There is the danger of friction. When people become intimate, temperaments may clash, purposes may cross, tempers may rise. It is a risky thing to make a friend. You may raise a devil, either in yourself or in the person you claim for friend. The biggest test of character is for two people to go and live together. There is nothing that can make a heaven like home, and there is nothing that can make such a hell. Strikes cannot paralyse a nation except in a complicated society. It is our very interdependence that makes the strike a tragic blow to the life of the community. It is the same with war. Three hundred years ago there was plenty of fighting but only on a small scale and only among one or two nations. The conflagration was easily limited. But modern war, by the very nature of our nearness, involves the whole world.

There are other dangers—the spread of disease, for instance. If the practice of medicine had not kept pace with the growth of the community, our very nearness would induce diseases that would destroy the world. And there is a worse danger than disease—there is social sin and social crime. There are sins

for which no individual is responsible, but in which all have a share. Some people who would scorn to underpay their own workers, have shares in companies where conditions are bad. Crimes which individuals would shudder to commit, are done unconsciously by the community through the system which has so far evolved. When the next revival comes, it will come like all others, in a wave of repentance, but it will be not only our own personal sins of which we will repent, when the light of heaven floods our life; it will be the social sins in which we share—the national pride which breeds wars, the poverty we permit to exist, the conditions we condone which a live social conscience would sweep away. No man can find a real peace with God for his own soul, without facing the social sins in which he shares. For "we are members one of another."

But this life together has its own *opportunities*. Toil can be lightened for thousands by the wise action of the community. Burdens which no single individual can bear for others, the community can carry. There are the poor who are beyond our individual help, but we can explore together some of the sources of poverty and dry them up. There will always be room for the good Samaritan picking up the man by the wayside. Communal philanthropy, which sacrifices that personal touch, will lose almost more than it gains. There is nothing that can be so soul-destroying as a system where the human touch is lost; but what a good Samaritan to thousands the community itself could be if only we held together and realized our strength! There are tremendous resources lying unused which will only come into play as we get together. There are

powers in our souls which will never be fully tapped till we have learnt the *fellowship* of service. For the strength of a community is more than the united strength of separate individuals. Inspirations awaken in a common struggle which one man alone can never find. Union means reinforcement of individual power. Faith kindles faith. Fellowship awakens enthusiasm. In spiritual arithmetic two and two make more than four. They make a body with a new life which finds its roots in God; for Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

But if we are to hold together, the question at once arises, what is the condition on which we can so live together, overcoming the dangers and finding the strength? We must find the common spirit, the spirit of fellowship. We must learn the secret of combination, if life is to be team-work. We need to get the spirit of the family; our trouble is that we have become a family, and have never caught the family spirit. To take a familiar illustration from the late coal dispute, the owners objected to the pool because they were afraid it would lead to inefficiency. And why? Because they could not depend on a loyal spirit that would make every one work together for the good of all. They may have been wrong. We may be called to a great adventure of faith in the way of fellowship, trusting that when we step out of the chill air of self-interest into the warm atmosphere of common service, depths of unselfishness will awaken that can never be revealed in any other way. For a great faith is created; it has the power to produce new things.

The fact is clear that before men can hold together

fully or whole-heartedly, they must possess the communal spirit. We cannot shut our eyes to the fact that there are people who talk a great deal about the community, who show very little real concern for the community. We shall have to get the right spirit before we shall get the ideal community. That is what many people forget. There are idealists who would make a neat and tidy world with everything in it arranged—on paper; but even if they got their Utopia they would find that it would go to pieces, as other attempts at Utopia have gone to pieces—for lack of the spirit to work it. We cannot get away from the moral factor. Many people who dream of better conditions and a new system to make a new world, forget that this new world when we have it, will be a very difficult place to live in. It will demand spiritual resources which at present we have not got. It will demand tact, and temper, and unselfishness, and mutual sacrifice, which, as things are, seem beyond us. We cannot run a system based on spiritual lines without a spiritual dynamic. We cannot make an ideal world by force, any more than we can make any other spiritual thing by force. *Every beautiful thing takes love to make it.* We cannot create anything except in the measure in which we put love into it. A writer describes the little garden of his early home which his mother used to keep. "She used to say that in the growing of flowers, love was as necessary as water. That seemed foolish to us. But somehow when she went away, flowers ceased to grow there." A new world is a new creation. It is a creation of the spiritual mind. We cannot make a new world except by the measure of love we are willing to

put into it. We cannot hold together in a common life which shall be strong and progressive; on the principles of the class war; or the temper of social superiority, which is the same thing camouflaged.

Now, here the spiritual man comes in and the Apostle displaces the mechanical expert. His message is the vital message of to-day, for it is the message of a love which alone can make fellowship. When *will* we come to see it? We are living in a world which God has given us on the condition that we put love into it, in all our relations with one another; without love it will go to pieces in strife and war and social sins that will turn life into a civilized jungle. It is love which has led men out of the jungle habits in which they used to live and made them peaceful citizens. It is love we need to run the machinery of this complicated modern world. Humanity is starving in every direction and stands broken and crippled on the march, for want of the spirit of love which alone can hold us together. It is no use blaming the capitalist alone. He needs love brought into his system, even though it changes the system; but the labourist needs it just as much. You can read pamphlets of communist societies which have "love" plastered all over them, but the spirit that oozes from every page is the spirit of black hatred of all classes except one. No new world can be brought into being by force, or kept running by force, without breaking to pieces in unspeakable disaster. "Though I have all gifts," wrote Paul, "and all power"—be a gifted speaker, a clever worker, a successful organizer, a talented manager—"and have not love, it profiteth nothing" for the kind of life God has given us to live. It is the spirit

of fellowship which alone can make men comrades in a common cause, in a common purpose, can bring the ship to port. Except we hold together, we cannot be saved.

What qualities does this common life demand? There is the spirit of sincerity, of frank and open dealing. Where love reigns, the black cloud of suspicion is not allowed to gather. And there is the spirit of forbearance. We must learn tolerance of others' faults. We must cultivate patience. We must have the kindly judgment. How much good breath would be saved if men would only give others credit for good intentions, even though their methods seem to be wrong!

And we must put ourselves in the place of others. We must think ourselves into their situation. We must sit where they sit. We must learn to feel their grievances and enter into their burdens. We have found ways of insulating ourselves against the shock of others' troubles by soft pads of comfort; or by the callous heart, till the world's agony which makes the air electric with unrest, leaves our conscience unmoved. We must change all this. Sickness and sorrow and the sufferings of others are our great opportunity of binding others to us in a sympathy that would quicken the pulse of the whole community with a new life.

And the common life demands self-sacrifice. It will mean loss to individuals, for it will have to be translated into terms of money. The poor will be richer, and the rich will be poorer. We will need to learn to pay our income tax with the same good grace as we give a large subscription to a charity. We will need to put our hearts into the payment of

our common dues. A tax can be as dear to God as the offering we make to the collection plate or the subscription we give to a charity, if we have the spirit of the community. Sacrifice is part of the price we pay for the privilege of our common life.

Where are we to find this spirit? We can only learn it from Jesus. Part of the pathos of the whole movement of our time is, that many are trying to be Christian without Jesus. They are trying to learn love without the power of the great Lover. We cannot learn to love men till we have learnt to see Christ in them. We cannot learn the spirit of forbearance toward others, save as we catch it from Christ's forbearance toward us. We cannot develop the spirit of trust, save as we know what it means to be trusted by Christ with the great trust of His friendship. We cannot learn the spirit of sacrifice, save at the Cross which is the fountainhead of all self-giving. How are we to get rid of the hatred and suspicion and selfishness which break out in strife, setting man against man? How are we to get rid of self?—that is the problem. There is only one answer. It must be crucified and slain in a great surrender to the Christ who masters us in the subduing discipline of His fellowship.

With a great wistfulness which is half-unconscious of itself, the world is seeking for the spirit which Christ brought in. Again and again, our very failures reveal the fact that the principles of Christ are no mere dreamer's visions from a far-off sphere without application to our life on earth, as they seem to many people. On the contrary, they are the revelation of the unseen order of reality which is the basis of the universe and the only secret of life and

happiness. Christ reveals in His principles the only ground on which we can hope to live together in happiness and peace. The laws of the spiritual life which He lays down, are the laws of human life in its reality; and we cannot expect either power or peace except as we live in harmony with these, any more than we can expect a healthy body in defiance of the laws of health, or a well-built house which disregards the law of gravity. The reason why Christ's principles seem impossible is that we look at them apart from Jesus. When Christ gave that teaching to His disciples, the thing that made all the difference was that *He* was there. They were in His company. They heard His voice. They felt the power of His friendly love. His spirit alone can turn what look like impossible commands into practical politics. From Christ alone we catch the spirit which is the cement of society. It is what we draw from Him and put into life, that will bring us together and keep us together, bridging our differences and solving our problems. Some time ago a book was published containing an account of a Communistic experiment which was made in Patagonia. A band of people under a leader, went there to set up a new State, but the one thing on which he had made up his mind, and they with him, was that there was to be no religion. Christ was to be left out of the ship, as He is being left out to-day by many of the advanced Communists. This little society went on well enough for a time, till the first impulse was exhausted; then differences began to creep in. The power was gone, "the Spirit was departed," selfishness broke out with all its accompaniments of vice and sin. At last, in sheer despair, the leader invented a

god of his own and went preaching this caricature of a deity, with disastrous results. In the end, the whole society was only saved from utter collapse by the advent of a man who preached Christ and brought the flame of faith to kindle their hearts into reverence, and purity, and brotherhood. It does not really matter what kind of political state we set up, provided it is Christian. No one knows in what external ways the spirit of love will organize the world and take shape in our common life. To pin our faith to one system rather than another, in the meantime, is to set the emphasis in the wrong place. It looks like tying the hands of the Spirit of God. But one thing is sure—disaster lies ahead for any state which is based on selfishness and materialism, whether it be of the classes or the masses. There is but one Captain of the ship who can hold us together. His rule is love. His commands are justice and righteousness. His men are comrades, forbearing one another, serving one another. Except *He* abide in the ship, we can none of us be saved.

THE CALL OF CHRIST IN OUR DAILY CALLING

"He, trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"—Acts ix. 6.

THE conversion of Paul is one of the most remarkable things in history. Explain it as we will, it can never be explained away. Critics have dealt with the outward signs, the light and the voice and the other accompaniments, and some have tried to belittle them. These are not the important things. The thing which *is* important is the life which resulted from the experience, and that is the thing which will not dissolve in the acid of criticism. In the last resort the outstanding miracle is not Paul's conversion —it is Paul's career. A new day dawned for Europe with its outworn civilization when Paul flung his old life dead at the feet of Christ and rose new-made.

One of the outstanding things in the conversion itself is the completeness of Paul's surrender to Jesus. His whole opposition to Christ collapsed like a great fortress whose foundations have been undermined. With many people, conversion is a long and gradual process. When Christ comes upon the soul, said John Owen, "He hath no quiet landing-place." He finds a foothold in one part of the nature, but it often takes years before He has consolidated His victory and won control of every part of the citadel.

Many men are Christian in their sentiments but they are not Christian in their thinking; they are Christian in their home but not in their business; in their private life but not in their social relationships; and often they do not realize it. Paul could do nothing by halves, even when he was trying to exterminate Christianity; and the very strength of his nature, organized and disciplined against Christ, went immediately over, with all its developed power, to Christ's control. Doubtless the ferment of Christianity had been working secretly in his unconscious mind. Down in the depth of his nature the conflict had been going on for long. The light (of unresisting love) on Stephen's dying face had struck deep into his soul and stirred a nest of uncomfortable suggestions. But however it was, there was nothing half-hearted in his surrender to Christ. It was a case of perfect abandonment. And he fell on his face, trembling and astonished, and said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

These words, on the surface, suggest a man whose life has been brought to wreck and ruin around him, and who is at his wits' end—the condition, as the Psalmist tells us, in which a man is ready to make a beginning with God, and God is able to take charge of his life. But there was more in the cry than sheer despair, for Paul was not in the habit of using words rashly. There were two things in it to which we ought to give our minds.

There was the instinct for action, and the acknowledgment that religion demands activity. "What wilt Thou have me to *do*?" Like everything else, Christianity must find expression in action, for genuine life produces activity. Every living thought

blazes a path for itself in words or deeds. Every deep emotion must find a channel. There is very little Christianity about a man if it is not making him do something. There is very little fire in the locomotive if it is not transforming its energy into motion. When God sought to reveal His highest thought, He put it into a *life.* Real religion is not a theology to be argued about, it is a life to be lived. The trouble with many people is that they use worship as a lightning conductor for religious emotion to pass harmlessly away, instead of finding some contact with life's tasks or duties in which that emotion can become vital and dynamic.

Further, religious activity is the activity of the whole life directed by Jesus. The whole man must be in it—the praying man, the loving man, and the working man. When Paul said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" he put his whole life at the disposal of Jesus. He gave into the hands of Christ the steering-wheel and the engine control and stood by to obey orders. He made Christ Master of the ship. He hailed Christ Lord of his whole personality. His thinking was to be guided by Christ for in Christ he recognized the truth. His ambition was to be directed by Christ for in Christ he had found life's glorious objective. He would take up whatever work Christ bade him do. He was ready to scrap all the old life, work and friendships, career and habits, in order that Christ might reconstruct his life from its foundations. Everything was flung into the melting-pot, to be run into the moulds and reshaped by Christ. Other men since his day have done the same thing, and made a completely fresh beginning. Francis of Assisi left behind him the whole furniture

of a rich man's life and went out to found a new order of Christian service. Brother Lawrence, after being a footman and a soldier, put his life at the disposal of Christ and found his sphere of labour in the kitchen of a Carmelite Monastery. However impossible such revolutionary changes of calling may seem to us in our own situation, they light up the meaning of Christianity, which is a life set at the disposal of Christ. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

This brings before us the whole question of the call of Christ and our daily calling. The truth faces us at once from this cry of Paul, that a man's daily calling must be part of the expression of his Christian life. There, as elsewhere, Christ must direct and control. Christianity is not an affair of leisure moments—an emotion we can express in the specialized activity of worship or devotion. To cut Christianity out of our daily work whatever that may be, and find no room there for Christian service, is to divide life into two conflicting parts, which in the long run will bring the whole structure of character to the ground. To shut the office door or the factory gate upon Christ, is to deny the mastership of Jesus in the most essential part of our life. For a Christian man, the phrase that "business is business" in the meaning some give to it, is a denial of Christ's right to rule. "I mean to live," said a man once, "and to have no gaps of death in the middle of my life." We dare not tolerate patches of selfishness in the middle of our Christianity. Life has no neutral territory where Christ is King.

We cannot close our eyes to the fact that this opens up a good many difficulties. For one thing, if our work is to be Christian, we must be sure we are doing

the thing Christ wants us to do. We must be sure we have a task which can express a Christian personality. That is where the shoe pinches. Can we fulfil this condition as things are to-day? Many people will tell us that as the world is now organized it is not possible. Who will dare to say that the right men are always in the right places? Most men and women find their work already cut out for them. The struggle for existence demands that they take the first thing which opens up as a means of earning a living. Thousands are flung by the pressure of life and an imperfect education into blind-alley employments, where they must drudge through life as best they can. There is no waste in the community so startling as the waste of its man power. Countless people are doing manual labour whose capacities are worthy of far wider opportunity. Countless others have found privileged positions which are far too big for their powers. Some tell us that the very conditions of their daily work are such as to stultify their souls and make the elementary Christian principles next door to impossible. There is a whole host of businesses which are unchristian both in their methods and in their results. Can a Christian man possibly find a legitimate calling in providing degrading entertainments, or unworthy literature, or make a profit out of trades which are poisonous to the moral and physical well-being of those who are engaged in them? The problem for a man in such a situation is one which he will have to face for himself by the light of his own conscience. It may be his duty to go out of a calling or business which offers a perpetual rebuke to conscience, if he is unable to change the conditions. Many of the early Christians had

precisely that problem before them. They found themselves in tasks which ministered to idolatry, for instance, and their work became a menace to their faith. Dr. R. T. Glover tells with charming tenderness the story of a sculptor in these early days who was converted to Christ. As the light broke gradually into his life, it came home to him that he could no longer make images of the gods for heathen temples. He could not put a Christian soul into a heathen image. Very reluctantly, but with conviction, he gave up that handicraft with all its appeal to the artistic sense, and took to a mason's calling, shaping stones, squaring and cutting — a prosaic occupation, but one at least which he felt was not inconsistent with his faith, and where he could find a useful way of serving his fellows. But the artist in his soul demanded expression in his work, and he conceived the idea of making a statue of the Good Shepherd with the lost lamb upon His shoulders. People criticised the truth of the statue. The Good Shepherd of the tenth of John has no lamb upon His shoulders; but the answer was that this was his experience of what Christ had done for him. He had been found by the Shepherd, lost and wandering, and the truth of Christ in his own soul demanded outlet in his craft.

That is the point. The truth of Christ in our souls must find outlet in our calling. Every part of life must give expression to the mind which has been touched by the redeeming power of Jesus. If we are His, our work must show it. It may be, the right thing for us is not to leave our post but to stay there and work steadily for changing the conditions, bringing a new conscience into a degrading business to sweep

it clean of all that is unworthy of truth and love. The business of a Christian society is to create a conscience about bad conditions and unworthy occupations. But the path for each individual is the path that opens up in answer to that surrender to Christ,—to that cry, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

There are two classes of people, however, who are not affected by what I have said. There are those who have still the power to a certain extent to choose their life-work. The world lies open with various doors of opportunity, and the question is, "What shall we be?" As we scan these doors we must pray, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" What is the line of life in which we can serve Christ best through our daily calling? We must lift the whole matter into the light of Christ. What is the calling in which we can be surest of His fellowship and direction? What is the calling in which we can exercise our gifts to the best advantage for Him and for His world? How can we best express a Christian personality, with such gifts as we have, or such limitations as we have, and find satisfaction for what is deepest in our nature? There is a hymn very dear to the Christian mind which assures us that—

> The daily round, the common task,
> Will furnish all we ought to ask.
> Room to deny ourselves, a road
> To lead us daily nearer God.

There are two fallacies in this view of a great truth. Our business is not to find room to *deny* ourselves; it is to find room to *express* ourselves. And the main purpose of our life is not to lead *us* daily nearer God; it is to carry the world nearer God, to make it a sweeter place to live in, a place in which people will

find it easier to believe in Him—though the one includes the other.

The word "calling" here involves the whole question. People use it freely without thinking what it means. We cannot choose a calling; we have to be called to it. People speak of their trade or profession as their calling, though in reality they have had no call and have sought no guidance, but have gone into it with a view of doing something which they felt would be congenial and in which they could earn their bread and butter with as little discomfort as possible. Our calling is something to which we have been called by the Spirit of God in the guidance of life. It means a task through which we can best exercise our will to serve Christ with all our gifts. We speak of a minister's call. For a Christian man every trade may be a calling as sacred as the ministry. A man may be called to build houses or bake bread, or sell clothes to the glory of God, as truly as a preacher to preach the gospel. What makes the service of Christ sacred is not the kind of work we are doing, provided it is honest—it is the spirit in which we do it, and the possibility of putting our whole self into it. The world is in sore need of men and women in definite Christian service at home and abroad, but the world is dying for men and women who will find in their work a sacred call and see in it a means of expressing their loyalty to Christ. What we need to-day, as some one says, is "the spiritual mind in the man of the world." Our choice of a profession must not be governed by the money we can earn or the profit we can win. The money pull in industry is the root of half our troubles. When the quality of work is confused with the

quantity of wages and our service is determined by our rewards, the devil gets into the business and our life goes off the rails. I have known men and women who made the choice of their destiny in the choice of their life-work. They saw a path of service, which they knew was the very call of God for them, where they could have done magnificent work, but another path tempted them with the promise of an easier life and a higher material reward. They chose the lower path, and ever after, the worm of dissatisfaction was in their souls, eating into their happiness, while "that great talent which were death to lose, lodged in them useless." God does not want any man to be anything else than himself. He does not want an artist to be a commercial man, or a man who would have made a first-rate clerk to become an indifferent minister. So far as we can, if the choice is open, we must find the place where we can best use such gifts as we have. How shall we hear the call? To some extent circumstances may guide us, but the whole matter must be lifted into the light of Christ, with the world's need open before us. We must begin by putting ourselves at His disposal, and bit by bit as we think the matter out in the spirit of a complete surrender, circumstances will shape for us an open door, and we will see our duty as clearly as a beckoning hand.

But what of those who have no choice, or have made their choice before they became alive to Christ, and now find all other doors are shut? It may be we are in a situation where, in the light of some new experience, we should like to change our calling. Many have already drifted into their niche by compulsions not of their own making. What are we to

say to them? The word for them is surely this,—that the compulsions of life must be accepted as the call of God. If we are in a place from which there is no escaping, that place is for us the place of our calling. It is the place in the meantime where God can help us to serve Him. The great thing is to take our work and our gifts and put them at His disposal *there*. Perhaps our work seems to give little scope for the expression of our souls and we have to find the full expression outside of it. Thousands are doing routine tasks where they become mere machines, working a lever or tending a loom the whole day long, year in and year out. Their whole personality is so depressed in those hours of labour that their temptation is to fly to some excitement when their work is done; and one of the tasks that face us is so to educate men that when routine work is over they will be able to find an outlet for their minds in some useful creative task or hobby.

But even in tiresome work there is room for the triumph of a Christian spirit. There is room for faithfulness and for honesty, and for doing the utmost we can, putting our best effort into a dreary task. These are the homespun virtues on which the world moves. These are the foundation virtues on which the happiness of the community is built, the very rock-bottom of all prosperity and peace. Many a task is dreary just because men are not putting their best into it. The point of joy is always the point of sacrifice. "When the sacrifice began, the song of the Lord began also with the trumpets." Poor work loses the power to produce the song in the heart. Nothing takes the zest from labour like half-hearted effort. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, 'labour

it up to the point of honour.'" All work can serve Christ if it is useful to humanity. We put a notice board at the church door stating that Divine Service begins at eleven o'clock. The church door has no right to a monopoly of that word. Above every office door, shop, and factory, a Christian man will read that notice illuminated by the inner light of the Kingdom in his soul—Divine Service begins here at seven o'clock or nine o'clock, as the case may be. "One is your Master, even Christ." The word still holds, and holds of every activity of life.

What industry needs to-day is a new baptism of the mastership of Jesus. Are there no changes we can make in the quality of our work, if not in the form of it? Would it not make a difference to the whole standard of life's comfort and the prosperity of our fellows if we took Christ into the workshop with us and made our toil a fellowship with Him? Would it not change the dingiest workshop into something like a temple, if we knelt in spirit at the bench at the day's beginning, like a priest at his altar, and sought to consecrate our gifts and our tools to Christ.

Our work, whatever it be, is only a channel. The task of a Christian man is the revelation of Jesus That is our business. Paul had to leave his early calling and scour the face of Europe with his gospel to do it. He revealed Christ with his mind, his tongue, his method, his friendship. He revealed Him in the helping hand he held out to others, in the courage and patience of his great soul liberated by faith amid a tangle of difficulties in victorious service. There is no part of our life in which the light of Christian character may not break through some chink or cranny. So far as we are Christian we

are translating Christ to the world in everything we do, as Christ revealed something of Himself in every situation. And a man can translate Christ to his fellows in the language of a finished piece of work, in its limited degree, as clearly as he can in a book or a poem or a sermon. The artist, the musician, the carpenter, the business man may all reveal Jesus in their conflict with the materials of their life. Dr. John Brown tells how Thackeray and two friends were walking out one night near Edinburgh while the red sun was setting over the hills. They came to a quarry from which a builder's crane stood up, with its cross beams in relief against the evening sky, lit by the dying splendour of the sun. They stood for a moment gazing at it, while the same thought struck them all, finding expression in one whispered word, "Calvary." There is a sacrifice in all true labour in which the spirit of man, at its best, shines out; as the soul of Jesus was revealed upon the black and bitter Cross. Have we ever seen in the drudgery which life demands, the possibility of a Calvary in which our souls may suffer to the point of pain, seeking to serve the Kingdom with our best—and suffering, may shine?

In these days in which we live, every calling has larger opportunities than lie upon the surface. There are men and women with whom our daily work brings us into the closest contact. There are great problems which every master and every man has some share in solving. There are tasks facing every employer to-day far greater than even the task of getting good work done; and every manual worker has business on hand far greater than securing a minimum wage and shorter hours. Every man has his opportunity, how-

ever small, of putting something, through his labour, into the making of the new world towards which life is leading us. What kind of spirit are we bringing into the industry with which we are connected? What spiritual quality is being liberated through the calling in which we serve the world? Is it the spirit of goodwill, of unselfish labour, of fellowship? By that spirit alone our industrial order will be brought into peace and harmony, and that spirit is the spirit of Christ. How many difficulties would vanish if every master looked on his men as Paul looked on those to whom he went to preach, "my brother, for whom Christ died," men with personalities of their own and qualities of soul craving expression in a worthy life; and not as mere instruments of production? How many problems would be solved if every workman looked on his employer as a man with his own task and burden, caught often against his own will in the toils of a system for which he is not responsible?

The great thing is to get away from all thought of rewards, into a sense of God's need of our labour and our direct responsibility to Him. The early Christians had a great picture ever before their eyes, the judgment-seat of Christ. No one stood between them and God; He came right into their life. It was He in the last resort with whom they had to do. They were fellow-labourers with Him in the great creative and redeeming task. They were helping God to finish His creation. In Him, amid the world's censure and disappointment, they found their peace.

> If there be good in that I wrought,
> Thy hand compelled it, Master, Thine:
> Where I have failed to meet Thy thought
> I know, through Thee, the blame is mine.

One instant's toil to Thee denied
Stands all Eternity's offence.
Of that I did with Thee to guide,
To Thee, through Thee be excellence.

Who, lest all thought of Eden fade,
Bring'st Eden to the craftsman's brain,
Godlike to muse o'er his own trade,
And Manlike, stand with God again.

THE TESTING HOUR OF LIBERTY

"So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, . . . And being let go, they went to their own company."—Acts iv. 21, 23.

THIS incident marks the passing of the first perilous hour of the Christian Church. Up to this point it had not been tried. It had been in the nursery, living within doors, a quiet and secluded company cherishing its sacred memories and lofty hopes in prayer and fellowship. There was just the chance that this faith might prove to be a kind of hothouse plant which the breath of persecution or the freezing contempt of the outside world would wither into nothingness. And this chapter tells of the first flame of that searching fire which leaped out upon them and through which they had to walk till every bit of shallowness and insincerity had been burnt out of their faith. How well they stood this test before the Council! Unlettered though they were, they found the gift of tongues. Dared to speak in Christ's name, they made answer that they dared not be silent. Threatened with every sort of dark and terrible fate, they had a fear in their hearts which made them proof against all other fear.

That hour before the Council was a revelation of character of the great shining depths of affection and loyalty to Christ which gleamed out of their rugged souls. "When they saw the boldness of Peter and

John, they marvelled." But that is not the revelation of which I want to speak. They had another test to pass through—the hour of liberty when the long strain was over and they stood in the street once more. They were free to go where they liked and to do what they chose—and they went to their own company. In its own way this was a revelation of the sincerity of their faith. It was a declaration of their secret souls. It revealed where their treasure was, and the things they valued most in life. Where did they go? They went to Stephen the martyr, and Mary of Bethany, and Matthew the Publican, and all the rest of that band of shining spirits—the very aristocracy of Christ. Could there be a clearer picture of the kind of men they were than this? When they let them go, they went to their own company.

To-day we think much of liberty, and speak much of liberty. All the currents of our time are flowing in the direction of a freer life, fewer hours of labour, less bondage of convention, less restrictions of any kind. Time was when men dared not say what they chose, or print what they wrote, or worship as their hearts bade them. We have moved from that bondage long ago. To-day, one after another, the old conventions are breaking. There is our way of spending Sunday, for instance; for good or ill, the old set ways of quietness and restricted pleasure are passing. People have different ways of looking at this drift toward liberty. Some are afraid of it; they look on it as a danger. There are those who tell us we have too little of that State control of our individual lives which made Germany before the war so efficient, its people so docile in their bravery and

their brutality, so easily driven to daring or devilment. Others, on the other hand, look on liberty as a glorious privilege, and a positive good in itself whatever it may lead to. For the moment let us look on liberty as this incident suggests—a test of character, a gift which reveals as nothing else can do, the kind of men and women we are. The hours of freedom are the searching, self-revealing hours of life. What we do then, think then, seek then, shows us what we are. When we are let go, we go to our own company.

There are numberless illustrations of this. To begin with, the hour of liberty from labour is a self-revealing hour. No one will deny that looking at a man's work, you can tell something about him. Character tells in the way we work and the kind of work we do. Slipshod work means shoddy character. Thorough work means a patient soul. Ruskin in his *Stones of Venice* describes a statue high up in a Venetian church, which to the outward eye was finished with exquisite skill, but if you climbed up to examine it more closely you had a rude shock, for the back of the statue, hidden from the spectator's eye, was left in its rough state—the work of a man who wrought only for appearances and cared little for the best. But ten years later, as Ruskin tells, having looked up the records, that man was banished from the city for forgery. There was a flaw in his character which ran all through. A man's personality is a unity. "The heart," says Emerson, "cannot be hid." Is there a streak of baseness somewhere about a man, is there a vein of gold among the dross, then it will run all through like a stratum in the rocks. You will meet it cropping up in his home life, in his friendships, in his worship, if you can look deep

enough; but the place where that streak of baseness or that vein of gold will show up most is the hour of leisure. When the clock strikes six, where does the mind travel, where do the feet begin to move? What are the pleasures we naturally seek, when we are absolutely free to use time as we please? What kind of thoughts do we think in the off-hours when we have no need to concentrate on the business in hand? What castles in the air do we build in the hour of the liberated imagination? What friends do we seek, and having found them, what is the trend of conversation when there is no absorbing topic of the moment? Does it run up or down? These things are judging us, showing us if we will only open our eyes, something, at least, of the kind of men and women we are at heart.

Or again, character is tested and revealed by the things men do when the leading strings of youth fall off. There is a perilous time in the life of every young man or woman, like this time in the early Church. It is the hour when the angel-guidance leaves us, as the angel left Peter, and we go down the big wide street of life alone. A young man's character will be seen in the way he treats his parents, when there is no longer need to obey them, in the deference he pays to their counsels, to their demands, even when these are querulous and galling. And the thing that reveals it best is the first hour of independence when a young man is on "his own." What customs does he fling off then? How do his affections, his tastes develop? Is he true or false to the principles he held—or thought he held? Has the fireside teaching reached his blood or only his brain? It is then he will learn, if he will, how much of his

goodness has been real and vital, and how much has been skin-deep; what of his principles have been his own and not merely a borrowed light; how much of his character has been a solid building and not a ramshackle structure kept standing by the props of others' compulsion and example.

There are people who speak of the first taste of dissipation, in phrases that try to take the taint from it; as the inevitable stumbling before men find their feet; as the sowing of wild oats before men settle down; as a careless abandon due to the first intoxicating taste of liberty. The truth is that every temptation which lures us at the moment of liberty is revealing something in us which responds to it. There is no temptation in all God's wide world the suggestion of which does not touch some chord in our own sensitive souls that maybe we have never known was there till then. The hour of liberty lifts the curtain from the inner life and shows us what is lurking within.

This word has a very real bearing upon our national life. For five years our nation was in the chains of a noble effort. Some were chained to munition work, some to hospitals, to the Army or the Navy—and there is no bondage so careless of personality as that—but the hour of freedom came. How are we using it? We have hardly had time to recover from the rebound and the question is still unanswered. But the next few years will be the clearest revelation of the national character we have had for long. We speak of war as a test, and it has been a test, but the years of war brought their own exhilarations, and its power to reveal our character, our real character, will be nothing to that of these

hard-won, blood-bought years of liberty. We often spoke of what we were learning in war; the years that face us will reveal the depth and seriousness of the lesson. The question before us to-day is the question of how we are going to use our liberty. What defilements will we cleanse away? What bonds of custom will we break? How will the national life shape itself? In what direction will we let loose our energies? The years ahead will test us, and by that test we will stand or fall.

Now it may be said we have been speaking of liberty as a *perilous* thing, and some one may ask the question why it should have been looked upon as so *precious*? Why have men been willing to suffer and die for it? Why has the whole urge of noble manhood carried us out toward wider liberties? Why has God Himself inspired these struggles for liberty? For, remember, there is no great struggle for freedom which has not religion at the back of it. It is a common habit to think of religion simply as a binding force, and some people fling it off as a kind of shackle. Yet there is nothing which has broken so many bonds, nothing that has given man such power to crush tyranny, as faith. A man never knows what a stifled, imprisoned life he has been living till he begins to breathe the air of faith. "Faith is the highest of high explosives." How many liberties came in with Jesus! What is forgiveness but the gift of freedom, the grace of a second chance, a glad new day for the man who has been sunk in some degrading bondage. Why, then, has God inspired this struggle right down through the ages, and awakened this desire of liberty? Why is liberty so precious to God if so perilous to man?

To begin with, the hour of liberty is precious because it is the hour of self-determination. It is the hour of the making of manhood and womanhood. The old beautiful story in the first chapters of Genesis tells of the gift of liberty God gave to man at his birth. He made him free of all the trees in the garden except one, but he put no fences round that tree; man could eat of it if he chose. And why were there no fences there? Because, only through choice, through the crisis of decision, through the freedom to take his own way, could man rise into manhood and struggle into power. You will never turn a child into a man by keeping him in leading-strings. Do not mistake me. There is far too little bondage, reasonable restriction, in the home-life of to-day. No man is fit to use his liberty till he has spent his opening years doing exactly as he is told, where the hand of compulsion is wise, and where in every possible case parents will give him a reason and enlist his will through his mind. Such wise compulsion will teach habits that cannot be learned any other way. It will train the wild shoots at the time when they are liable to riot, and give the tree the best chance of growing straight. But a point comes where these bonds must fail, must be cut, if the tree is to flourish into its best. No man can grow into manhood save by the struggle and the travail of great decision made, by himself and for himself, in the lonely spaces of his own unfettered soul. It is by that struggle and stress we grow.

The things we do in this perilous and precious hour of liberty make or mar us. It is the friends we choose of our own free affection that have the keeping of our souls, not those that are forced upon us. It is the

decision we make when we are free, that determines our destiny. It is the deeds we do when the chain is off, that stamp upon our nature the marks of doom or glory. It is the worship to which we give ourselves in the freedom of our aspiration, the prayers that start out of the heart's agony, though they be but a sob, which bring us the peace and the power of God's presence. An old writer on liberty, when the first glory of religious freedom began to dawn in England, set down his reason for religious toleration. "I may grow rich by a word I take no delight in. I may be cured of some diseases by medicines I have no faith in; but I cannot be saved by a religion I detest or a ritual I abhor." There is no real goodness which does not come from the goodwill. Christ Himself refuses a love which is forced, an allegiance which is not free; in point of fact there is no such thing.

But there is another reason for the preciousness of liberty. It is God's faith that if a man be free, really free—there is something in him deeper than anything else, something in the very centre of his being, which will start out and lead him straight to God. Take it for granted: a man is not at home till he has found his home in God. And the hour when bonds break and he is alone, unfettered, brings the awaking of home-sickness. Not when he was living in the household with all its regulations did the prodigal awake to the blessedness of home; but in the far country when, one after another, his false friends had cast him off. Bit by bit, the spell of sin was broken and he was alone in the desert. *Then* his heart turned back to home, and the prayer broke out like water from a long choked fountain, "I will arise,

and go to my father." When he was let go, he went to his own company. Men have sometimes kept an imprisoned bird for a year or two, giving it now and again its freedom under the delusion that they could tame it, so that it would never crave its native air. But one day the window was left open and it hopped into the sunshine, looked around, tried its wings, and was off to return no more. Nature and the wide sky and the company of its own kind called it because it belonged to these, and in freedom it found itself.

Nothing can finally force a creature—man or beast—to be content with an alien bondage. Some day in the hour of freedom it will seek its own, or long to seek it, with a longing which nothing in its sheltered surroundings can quite repress. Hawthorne has a weird story of a birthmark which marred the face of a very beautiful woman. She married a husband who adored her, and to make her still more beautiful he sought and found a chemical which would remove the birthmark. He used it and the mark disappeared like the stain of the rainbow fading out of the sky; but that day the woman died. A strange tale! What does it mean? We can make our own interpretation. It might suggest that in the most perfect attachment, for the discipline of our forbearance, there is always something which love has to live down—some imperfection to make us love one another, as Mrs. Browning puts it, "for love's sake only," and not for some pretty touch of manner or surface beauty. But on the other hand, it might suggest that on every one of us there is a birthmark, the mark of our origin in God, and you cannot remove that mark without destroying the man himself. It is in us, as the rainbow is part of the

sky. Deeper than all conventions, deeper than the stain of sin, deeper than any pressure of tyranny to slay or smother, it belongs to us; and it is God's faith for you and me, that in the hour of freedom we shall seek and find our own in God.

Here, then, is the safeguard of liberty—to see it in this light. All liberty is God's gift—our free hours, our free lives, the freedom which is our heritage to-day. Freedom is not safe for any one of us till we see it as a sacred trust. It is God's trust, and His purpose by the gift of it, is to draw our lives to Him. In point of fact, our only real freedom is the freedom to choose our master, and only as we choose God for our Master do we keep our liberty. Life's revenge upon us for misused liberty is always to bring us under some darker bondage.

The end of the war has brought freedom to us in many ways. For some people it has come in the uprooting of the old life so that they are free to make a new beginning. For others it has meant a recovery of their manhood and the discovery in themselves of powers unrealized—courage, and comradeship, and energy, which war has awakened and used and then released. For some of us freedom has come in ways that are shadowed and dark. Old ties are broken. Ambitions we cherished for some we loved are shattered. Avenues of hope are blocked. We have been detached and set free. Yet in this freedom, is there not a call of God? Can we not find, even in the sorrow which has closed some doors, a way opening up to a larger usefulness, which but for this sad liberation had been impossible? If death has loosened anchors, is it not a call to launch out upon God's tide, to use our lives for some purpose

which is more directly vital to His Kingdom? Is there no one we can help, for instance, with the money we would have lavished on the boy who died for country, no work for Christ that waits to fill the empty hands?

And freedom has come to our nation, old ideas are fading, old prejudices are breaking down, old customs are dying, the dark shadow that has threatened us for a generation has been rolled away. How shall we use our freedom? That is God's call to us to-day. Patriotism as a national ideal is not enough for a nation such as ours, with our power of spiritual leadership among the nations. There is only one safeguard for us. It is to remember that our liberty is a trust, a trust from God. The blood of struggling saints and heroic soldiers is in it. The shadow of the Cross of Calvary, within which every sacrifice takes its rise, is over it. We are not our own, we are bought with a price. Our freedom is not our own. It is theirs. It is God's. Wherefore, in the new free days that lie before us, "let us glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are God's."

THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH

"By faith the Israelites passed through the Red Sea: . . . which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned."—Heb. xi. 29.

NOTHING can teach us so much as history, if we read it aright. There is only one way to read it aright—by the light of God. That is what the Bible does for us; it gives us history read by the light of God. It illuminates the events of life in their spiritual significance which is their only real and final significance.

This sentence is a lightning sketch of a great historical event seen in the light of God. Here are two bodies of men facing the same difficulty. They have gone out on the same road, the one pursued, the other pursuing. There is very little to choose between them so far as the eye can see, except that we would imagine the Egyptians had the best chance of overcoming the impasse. Yet the one failed and the other succeeded. The Israelites got over dry-shod, while the Egyptians were swamped in the waters and were utterly lost. Wherein lay the difference? That is what the writer explains in our text. He is not dealing with this matter from the scientific point of view. His business is not with the mechanical process by which the Red Sea was crossed. He is concerned with the spiritual secret which in the end lies behind all physical processes—the final root of all

victorious achievement even in the brute struggle of life. It was more than a coincidence, more than mere bad luck. The secret lies deeper. It lies deep down in the roots of the soul, in the attitude with which they were facing life. By faith, says the writer, the Israelites crossed over the Red Sea. And faith is the spiritual attitude to life. It is the attitude by which men see life's meaning in God, and launch themselves out upon the hopes and promises and promptings which rise within the soul when we get face to face with God. There lay the difference. The one set had the spiritual attitude to life; they were obeying a spiritual instinct; they were giving themselves up to the challenge and call of God within their souls. The others had no faith. They were out only for their own advantage; they were living for the moment; for the pleasure and prosperity of the hour. They saw nothing in this upheaval of the Israelites except a movement of rebellion which was going to deprive them of the source of their wealth and comfort. There lay the difference, and when it came to a crisis, the one set survived, and the other went down. By faith the Israelites passed through the Red Sea: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.

Now this is a tremendously suggestive way of putting things. It sends its light into the life, to-day, both of men and nations, in many directions. There are two things which lie upon the surface. The one is that it is not circumstances that count in life; it is the men who face them. In other words, it makes all the difference in any situation what kind of man is facing it. The key to events lies in the men and women who play their part in them. Some-

times a difficult problem arises in politics or engineering, and a tremendous task has to be faced. Can it be done? men ask, and they get to work upon the circumstances, figuring things out and making calculations. They make up their minds perhaps that on the facts the thing is impossible; and then some one defies all their calculations and does the thing in spite of them. One man will succeed where a dozen of others will fail. One man will quell a stormy meeting with an argument which would only arouse laughter if it were used by another. When David Livingstone stood facing the Kalahari desert and looked longingly across to the other side, he was warned on every hand that it was no use attempting it, for others had tried better equipped than he, and their bones lay white on the desert sand. But Livingstone went and got through. There is only one explanation; he was David Livingstone, and they were not. The secret of success or failure does not lie in circumstances. It lies in the spirit of the men and women who tackle the difficulty, and in the secret roots of personality from which their strength is drawn. These two sets of people went out to meet the same barrier under the same conditions. There was no reason in nature why the Red Sea should have yielded to the one and not to the other. The difference lay within themselves. The one set were Israelites and the others were Egyptians.

The second thing which lies upon the surface is this, that the vital difference between one man and another lies in the possession of faith, or the want of it. The secret of triumph is victorious personality, and that is the product of creative faith. Faith is always creative. It puts that into a situation which changes

everything. On the surface, the Egyptians should have won. They were far better equipped. They had the advantage of civilization and the gift of a hundred vanished arts. They were highly skilled and efficient in many departments of life, as we know from their ancient monuments. The Israelites were a race of slaves, cowed in spirit, petty and shortsighted, wearied out with years of drilling and tyranny. But they had faith and the others had not. It was only a spark of faith they had, a mere germ which a chance visitor would hardly have detected. But faith is a thing of infinite possibilities. As Christ has told us, even though it be small as a grain of mustard seed it lays open to us the resources of God. It links men on with the strength of the eternal. It brings into life the powers of the unseen world. There is nothing to which it cannot grow, and nothing in life which will not yield to it, if only it be real. It is the final secret of all efficiency, even in the things of this world. Zinzendorf the Moravian mystic, was fond of riding and could master the wildest horse in his father's stables. Some one remarked on his efficiency in horsemanship and wondered how it could exist in a man of his unworldly mind. His answer was that only the man who is living above the world is the master of the world.

There are people who imagine that faith is a mere fancy, a kind of additional grace added to life, a thing of taste or temperament. *It is the greatest of mistakes.* Faith is the one vital thing in life, the one thing which makes the real difference between one man and another. It is high time we Christian people realized the vital value of our faith in God

There never was a time when we needed more to insist on the difference between a religious man and an unbeliever. The truth is, that in the last resort faith is the one thing that counts. The thing that really measures and judges a man, is what he is in the deeps of his spirit in relation to Jesus Christ. How do we stand toward Christ? that is our real standing in the world. What place does Christ take in our lives? That is the real test of life's efficiency in such a world as this. That is the heart of everything—the secret of personality, by which we make our mark on things in the long run. It may not appear on the surface at first; but it is the root of everything—our influence, our power, our character, our service; and in the long run it determines our destiny. Everything comes out of that hidden fountain of personality of which our secret life is attuned to God, and to the purposes of His Kingdom.

So from the heights of Will
Life's parting stream descends.
And as a moment turns each slender rill
Each widening torrent bends,—

From the same cradle's side,
From the same mother's knee,
One to long darkness and the frozen tide,
One to the Peaceful Sea.

It was the moment when their souls were lit with the spark of faith and hope and they gave themselves up to its light and leading, which decided the destiny of these Israelites, and their souls reached the power to master circumstances and bend them to their will.

Now if we want proof, that the religious man is the master of all things and has the power of shaping life, we have it in one familiar fact. We are for ever

being forced by the very necessities of our life, into situations where we cannot do without God, and the power which faith brings into life. *When we take it seriously*, life is always carrying us into circumstances which we cannot meet and master without the help of God. Here is a young man who is forced out into life by the necessity of his career. He goes from his quiet home into the wider world, to a great city, it may be to a foreign land. In a moment he finds himself up against strange and intoxicating temptations, where he is in constant peril of being carried off his feet. It comes to him that if he is to meet these things fairly and keep his footing, he must find something to hold on to, something big enough to quell the illusion of temptation that is for ever laying its spell upon his soul. He is up against a situation in which there is no help for him except in a new look at Jesus Christ, strong enough and vivid enough to bring into his soul the glory of redeeming grace. Through faith he can meet these things, without faith he will go down.

Or take the fact of sorrow. Sooner or later we are forced up against it. A big cloud swoops down upon us like a thunderstorm in a summer sky. All our life is in ruins. That is a common situation. How are we to meet it without going under? We may try one thing and another, but before long it comes to us that we cannot meet it without God. The ordinary commonplaces of comfort are not enough; they are insipid; they are an insult to a broken heart. Spiritualism is not enough; though the very craze for spiritualism is one of the best testimonials that was ever given to the spiritual nature of man. It is a confession that in the hour of sorrow we are up

against a situation which we cannot meet without drawing upon the resources of the Unseen. When a great singer lost his only son in the war, he said to a friend, "When a man comes to a thing like this, there are just three ways of it. There is drink, there is despair, and there is God; and by His grace, it's God for me." By faith, in such an hour, we shall get through and keep our footing and our hope; without faith we shall be drowned!

Perhaps it is the necessity of the world's need which sends us out to a difficult situation. God knows it is oftentimes harder to see others suffer than to suffer ourselves, and especially to see the suffering of those we love. On the impulse, we rush in to help. We yearn to take some sinking soul, and lift him up. We long to save some one from the grip of a habit which is dragging him down to the depths. Is there anything more baffling, more disheartening, anything which throws a greater strain on our patience, on our faith in humanity, than to look at the world as it is in many places and to try to do some service in it? The world is full of people who have tried to meet its need and have gone under, finding their own faith swamped in wave after wave of cynicism and despair which came over their souls. There is only one way in which a man dare meet the need of the world, dare face its crushing burdens and sins,—by a new and victorious faith in God and in the amazing potency of grace. Sooner or later we must come to that, or go down. I have known students for the ministry who left their college, after training, with a very feeble faith, riddled with intellectual doubts—they were, of course, only cutting their wisdom teeth. But when they went out and faced the bitter needs

of the world, it came to them that they must find a living Christ, a divine and radiant Saviour, or else have no message that would meet the need of to-day and renew the miracles of the New Testament. By a full and passionate faith, they could get through and go on; without it, they must have gone under in despair.

These are but passing illustrations of this great fact that we are out in a world where there is no help for us but in God. We may cry out as some men do upon such a world as this. There is a picture by a great artist, which depicts God in the act of making His world. As the vision of it, with all its terror and tragedy, looms up amid chaos, there is one who says to Him, "If about to make such a world as that, stay Thine hand." This is how we all feel sometimes. But the truth is, the world was never meant for the man who would live in it without the power and hope of a living faith. We have no right to meet life without God and then complain about it! Life is a spiritual adventure which we can only face upon the terms of faith. The love that made the world, alone can give us power to live in it. The God who made us free, has resources in His grace enough to meet every situation—even those we create by the abuse of freedom. That is a great word of Paul's, that in God we live and move and have our being. What does it mean but just this, that the whole order of things is a spiritual order. It is from God's hand we take it, and we dare not take it without God any more than a captain dare face the ocean without that contact with the magnetic current by which his compass is directed, without the sun and stars by which he steers. Without God and the contact with Him which comes by faith, life is a vast meaningless

ocean swept by tides and tempests which have us at their mercy, so that we become derelict. In God we live and move and have our being, and it is only as we keep our being in God, that we can live and move.

This incident has a very special application to our time and to its needs. Life has forced us in these days upon a very difficult adventure. We are moving into a time in which we shall need more faith than ever men had before.

There is the international situation, for instance. How is that to be met? One thing is certain, we must get out of the old place in which we have lived so long, into a land of new relationships between the nations. God is calling us, by the very shudder in our soul and the ghastly experience of war, to find a new way of living. It is unthinkable, in spite of the prophecies of famous generals, that we should begin to plan our life afresh on the basis of future wars. God is calling us to such a new way of life as is foreshadowed in the League of Nations. To be sure, that has its difficulties. So had the journey to the promised land for the Israelites; it had its difficulties. There was the Red Sea to begin with, and if they had waited till everything was clear, they would never have gone out at all. The League of Nations has its difficulties and its risks. It means a pooling of interests. It means a call to sacrifice and to unselfishness. It means exchanging the old securities for the forces which are awakened by a great-hearted faith in God and in one another and in the power of justice and righteousness—to hold the nations together and bring them into a way of peace. There is no going back! And there is no going forward without this faith and all that proceeds from it. The League

will be what we make it by the spirit we breathe into it. It will have the power we put into it, and the power by which it can stand is the power that comes from the vision of the Kingdom. By faith we shall cross over, without faith we shall go down.

And there is the national situation to-day. Here again we are being forced out into a new world. The old world of self-interest has become too narrow for the growing soul of democracy. Put it as we like, that is the inner meaning of it. Great classes of men are moving out to demand a new voice in the direction of their own affairs. They have caught a vision of a promised land, the whole nation has caught that vision—the vision of a new Britain—and we are out to find it. But the way is full of peril. There are rocks ahead and barriers which must be overcome. The Red Sea was a trifling obstacle to the Israelites, compared with the transitions which we are facing to-day. And the question is, how are we facing them. Have we faith enough in God and in one another? Is there vision enough in the rising democracy to lead it clear of the swamps of sheer materialism and class-selfishness? Is there vision enough in the stalwarts of the old order, to let the past go at the right moment, as men on the harbourside let go the cables when the ship is ready to start out. The crux of the matter is, that we are being forced into a new way of social and economic life, which demands spiritual qualities—goodwill and unselfishness and loyalty to one another. Do we realize that these can only come from faith in God and a new vision of His Kingdom?

We shall never get through till we all bring the mind of Christ to bear upon the situation. It is an hour when the nation needs men of faith and vision

at the helm of State, men who will steer by the stars and not grope from point to point with the rush-light of expediency. In 1652, when things were going badly with this nation in the war with Holland, the great John Owen preached to Parliament, "You take counsel with your own hearts. You advise with one another. You hearken unto men with a repute of wisdom, and all this doth but increase your trouble. You do but more and more entangle and disquiet your own spirits. God stands by, and says, 'I am wise also,' and very little notice is taken of Him." Does not that strike the note of our need. God stands by, as He stood by the Red Sea; *God stands by.* Are we going to bring in His wisdom, the guidance that comes through prayer, the faith that comes by seeing men and things with the eyes of Jesus. Ours is a fatal situation for anything short of a full and vital and wide-hearted faith.

And there is a message here for the Church of Christ. What is the secret of the Church's weakness, in the life of to-day? For we cannot deny that weakness, in some respects at least. Let us get to the root of it. Are we living up to our resources in God? Are we meeting the tasks of life with the requisite faith? Are we staying our souls on the mighty forces which are in Christ? Are we drawing from Him to give to the world what He has to give? Is the witness of our daily life clear and shining? Are we reaching a personal victory over sin and circumstance, by redeeming grace? Spiritual tasks demand spiritual men. Are we facing the tasks of the Kingdom in the spirit of the Kingdom? Have we put on the whole armour of God? We cannot live the Christian life, or make the Christian witness

which our day demands, on a starvation diet of narrow views of God, and anæmic hopes of what Christ can do for us. To put the question in another way, are we working up to our strength? Are we facing the tasks we ought to face? Is there any Red Sea in our experience? Are we coming up against any insuperable difficulty? Have we gone out to do anything so hazardous, so big, that failure means destruction, and defeat means the loss of everything? That is the kind of task to which God calls the Church in all the ages. He calls us to attempt things which are impossible on the face of them, where failure means calamity. But that is just God's way of leading us, His way of discovering Himself. We speak sometimes of *a desperate situation.* That is the very kind of situation in which the Church may become alive! *When we are on the brink of despair, we are really on the edge of a victorious faith.* Is not part of the reason of our poverty this—that we have not been living on levels of service where we *must* have God—or die? It is told of a famous Edinburgh preacher that when he felt himself losing grip of a vital gospel, he took a walk through the worst slums of the city on a Saturday night. What he saw there, sent him back to his knees and to his Bible, to explore afresh the redeeming reality of Jesus.

Beside every impasse God stands till we come up to it, waiting to work the miracle, waiting to reveal Himself in the endowment of power. God never gives any man power in reserve. We live only by the grace we are forced to use. In the *Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan puts this very clearly. Christian went out at the secret bidding of his soul with his face to the light, went on till he fell into a slough

that lay just across the road; and being in it went on, still with his face to the light, though he could see no way of getting out. Then, and not till then, did he see the stretched-out hand of Help, who mysteriously came and mysteriously went—none other than the Holy Spirit Himself. Only when we face tasks in His name which put a strain upon our faith, only then will rise within us the strength of God.

THE TROUBLED LIFE AND THE UNTROUBLED HEART

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. . . . Let not your heart be troubled."—John xiv. 27.

THE word "peace" falls on our ears to-day with the sound of far-off music. For years we have longed and prayed for peace. To-day it seems farther off than ever. The years since the Armistice have been the most disappointing years in the last half-century. We are living through a time of so many disillusionments, that hopefulness has almost become the kind of thing of which a good man is half ashamed. Miss Underhill, in an article in the *Hibbert Journal*, describes the civilized world to-day as "living under a cloud. Like a neurotic man whose sickness has no name and few definite symptoms beyond general uneasiness and loss of hope, it is incapable of the existence which it feels to be wholesome and complete. Impotent and uncertain of aim, society is becoming more and more querulous and less and less reasonable. Sometimes it seeks violent and destructive changes as the only cure for its state. Sometimes it tries grotesque and superstitious remedies. Sometimes it relapses into apathy." That is a true description of the malady of the age. It is easy to say that we are suffering at present from the inevit-

able reactions of war, and comfort ourselves with reading history. It is true, that in a sense we are suffering from unhealed wounds, and that some day, if we have patience, the wounds will heal and we shall recover our wonted buoyancy. But unhealed wounds, as every surgeon knows, are dangerous. They may become septic, or make a gathering point for a deep-seated poison which is seeking some outlet. And all the while we are talking about leaving the cure to time, it may be that deep-seated poison in the system which needs to be dealt with and got rid of, before the wounds will heal and the body have peace. In any case we can be sure that if the secret of peace is to be found, it is Christ alone who has the real prescription. The key to peace is in His hands —the peace of the heart and the peace of the world. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Now what is the nature of this peace of Christ? He describes it as "My peace . . . not as the world giveth." He knows, as we all know, that there are various ways of finding peace. Some find peace by an escape. They run away from the things that trouble them. They find means of diverting their minds and of insulating their lives, so that no live wire of outside trouble can bring any shock to their self-centred system. There are people, indeed, who contrive to take advantage of situations which bring trouble to others. Never a ship is wrecked but some one will be waiting to gather up the débris and build a house out of it to keep himself warm from the storms in which others go down. But, however we may find peace, no honourable man can accept it at

the expense of ignoring the facts of life, or sheltering himself against the troubles which are threatening others. When the world is racked and bleeding all around us, a true man will even ask himself the question whether he has any right to peace of mind at all. Can we take peace even from the hands of Christ, and be loyal to a world in which God has made us one family? Dare we find peace, even in religion, if it means running away from life? There were many great souls among those who went into the cloisters in olden days. They went there to keep the fire of faith alive and to make their protest, by a holy life, against a world grown so vicious that there seemed little hope of saving it from without. But we cannot help having the same kind of feeling about the man who finds in devotion and prayer a selfish security from wind and storm as we would have felt about any of the Allies if during the war they had made a separate peace. If there is a peace of God for you and me to-day, amid the trouble around us—and this is the offer of Christ—it must be a peace which will not drug our soul or side-track us from the main road of the struggling world. It must be a peace within the storm, not outside of the storm. It must be a peace which faces facts, not a peace which puts on blinkers against realities.

It is that kind of honourable peace which Christ offers us. "*My* peace," He said. Think for a moment of the circumstances in which the offer was made. He was at the very storm-centre of a world seething with hatred and unrest. Black tempests were gathering around Him. He was facing the ordeal of His Cross. He was bowed down beneath a load of suffering and grief and disappointment which nearly

crushed Him. He was hiding nothing of it all from Himself. Even on the Cross, He refused the myrrh which would have soothed His senses and clouded His mind. Browning catches the kind of spirit in which He faced death:

> I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
> And bade me creep past.
> No, let me taste the whole of it.

Even religion was no opiate for Jesus. There is no warrant in Christ for the charge which the Bolshevists are said to make against Christianity, that "religion is the opium of the poor." Out of that very maelstrom which was sucking Him down to death, He spoke of His peace.

What, then, is His peace? True peace is the harmony between our nature and our environment. Unrest comes from a clash between a man's nature and the world in which he lives. But here is the point. Our true environment is spiritual. If there is conflict in our souls, it is because we have chosen to live in a narrow world in which there is no room for our souls to find freedom. There is a Will that beats through everything, a Mind that thinks in everything, a Heart that loves through everything. When we are in accord with God, we find peace. How can a man be at peace whose being is out of tune with the nature of things, whose will is at cross purposes with God? As well expect health in a body where all the physical laws are broken. Track down the unrest of our time, whether it shows itself in classes or in individuals, and you find friction between the souls of men and the nature of things, which is the

will of God. This unrest may show itself in various ways. It may appear in a constant strain, in the jarring machinery of industry, in hollow dissatisfaction which keeps us ever seeking and never finding, —in restless activities which wear us out and achieve nothing. Many people are like a clock which has lost its pendulum. You wind it up and off it goes at a furious pace of whirring wheels which is soon finished and played out. But attach the pendulum, and the result is a movement which is peace—stable, restful, calm, purposeful. What has happened? The law of gravitation has come into play—the law which rules the resistless tides of ocean, and guides the majestic stars in their courses. The little clock with its feverish heart has been taken up into that mighty movement and there is peace. That is what our lives need. They need to be linked on to God. There is inner conflict, because the deepest and most vital instinct of our nature is being repressed—the instinct for the divine. We are born to take our part in a movement which is far larger than ourselves. While our lives are moving in the orbit of selfishness there is sure to be confusion. There was no shadow between Christ and God. There was perfect understanding between Him and His Father, and where there are no shadows between a man and God, no earthly troubles can break this deep and final peace of the spirit; and out of that peace comes power to meet whatever life may bring. It is this peace He offers to us all, the peace of a heart at rest in God. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you."

How did this harmony with God show itself? Let us look into the nature of this peace more in detail.

In the first place, it showed itself in a divine valuation of life, which puts things in their true perspective. That valuation set Christ beyond the reach of many of the things which trouble us. Loss of property, for instance, did not trouble Him, or the fear of it, for He set no store by money for its own sake. The scorn of men or the withdrawal of their esteem did not trouble Him, for He set no value on the smile of popular favour. It is a wrong valuation of the good of life, which creates much of our unrest and lays us open to the torment of fear. "The love of money," says the apostle, "is the root of all evil," and among its evils he shrewdly puts his finger on this, that the man who sets out to be rich falls into many a snare and pierces his heart through with many sorrows. The more we sink our roots into the earth, the more our lives are shaken with every tremor of passing earthquakes. The more we become dependent on material things, the more we are exposing our hearts to anxiety and disappointment and all the things which bring dispeace. One reason why some people are so dangerous to the country to-day is that they have nothing to lose by a violent upheaval. There are few sensitive points at which discomfort and loss can touch them. The man who is thus detached is in a strong position. That was part of the strength of the early Church; she had nothing to lose. And the world will only be set right by men who value principles above possessions, who are detached enough from the treasures of earth to be undeterred from righteousness by the pistol point of life's ills. The man who has accepted Christ's values is free. There are troubles he discounts at the very start. There are events which never cause him a

tremor of fear. He has not staked his life on possessions, or position, or popularity, or any of these shifting foundations. He has sunk the base of his life down to the solid rock. He wants what Christ wants, and sees that that is best. What care we give ourselves by pinning our life's success to the little things instead of the big things, to the accidents instead of the essentials! The great Dr. Chalmers made a speech to the Assembly of the Church of Scotland about ministerial training in which he gave the story of his own changed mind. He had been a distinguished student of mathematics in his day; but that was poor preparation for a preacher of the gospel. "Strangely blinded was I," he said. "What is the object of mathematical science? Magnitude and the proportion of magnitude. But then, sir, I had forgotten two magnitudes, the littleness of time and the greatness of eternity." It is the eternal values which make life great, and fill it with joy and satisfaction. Peace is the possession of the heart which has found the secret of reality in Jesus, and is lifted above the cruel mercy of life's tides of fortune or favour. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you. . . . Let not your heart be troubled."

But again, Christ's peace was rooted in a right relation to men, a relation which sprang from His oneness with God. If a man is really one with God, that harmony will make itself felt in a right attitude to men. Much of our dispeace comes from a wrong attitude to others. The dark heart of the world's unrest to-day is full of such things as hatred, suspicion, jealousy, spite, contempt of man for man. These are the ingredients of the devil's cauldron which brews the deadly spirit. There is no peace in

any heart till it is emptied of these or lifted above their reach.

It is not a pleasant thing to be hated, but the dispeace comes when that hatred is allowed to stir the dust of our own passion. We lose our peace—not when others hate us, if there is no lurking suspicion that it has been deserved; we lose our peace when we hate others. To hate another, or suspect another or despise another, is the root of dispeace in our own hearts. It spoils our own spirit; it opens the door to a perfect storm of unrest. That was, in part, what Christ meant when He spoke of loving our enemies. He knew that there is nothing so fatal to peace as the spirit of hatred and revenge. Look at Christ upon His Cross. When their hatred was seething round Him, at the very moment when He was being overwhelmed, He cried, "Father, forgive them." There was no dispeace in His soul. No man was ever so bad but Christ could love him, none so evil but Christ could find a reason for pitying him. Taunts and criticism drew from Him nothing but compassion. The worse people were, the more they were in need of God. The more they hated, the more they were in need of love and guiding. They were sheep that had gone astray, or had been led astray, and the cruelties which they were heaping on His poor body were really wounds they were making in their own souls. They stabbed His heart with the spear, but they could not break His peace, because they could not change His love.

Part of the secret of peace is this loving attitude towards others, "Fret not thyself about evildoers," says the Psalmist. Do not let the wrongs of others overthrow the balance of your own soul. Say the

worst you can about the things men do, there is always something about a man if we could see him with the eyes of Christ, which would draw tears of compassion instead of curses of anger. And these tears in the long run will break down barriers, which are armour-plated against the thunderbolts of wrath. All the great souls have had this love, this forbearing outlook on others, and it has kept them strong amid a thousand peering littlenesses. You remember the oft-quoted speech of Lincoln, just after his second election as President. Things had been said and done that would have broken many a man's heart. The country was bleeding from civil war. But it never broke Lincoln's peace, for his own attitude was right. "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds"—including, of course, those of their enemies—"to care for the widow and the orphan, to do all that may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace for ourselves and all mankind." There is no pettiness there, no bitterness, no grudge. And that spirit of peace, Christ's peace, can reign even in such a day as this.

But how does this peace come? It comes from a perfect surrender and response to the love of God in all its challenge and all its security. And the love of God is a challenging thing. The love of God, if we take it in, throws our souls open to the assault of countless needs and ills, and to a tempest of rebuke We have made too much of religion as a safety device for the soul, too much of it as a quiet haven of rest into which we retire and find peace. The price of Christ's peace is war. The cost of

Christ's rest is struggle. "My peace," said Christ, "I give to you." What lives the disciples led after that gift! There was scarcely a day when they were free from trouble. It was the condition of their peace. Had they stayed in the cloister, like the monk in the story when the world's need rapped at the door, instead of moving out to the challenge of love, they would have lost the gift by cultivating it.

The honourable peace which this utter surrender to the love of God brings is thus a twofold thing. It calls us to battle. There is no peace we can accept for ourselves so long as the world is full of the sin and suffering which make the lives of others unhealthy and unholy. There is no rest from mortal fight for any of us so long as our hearts are tainted with selfishness and pride. For the man who loves with the love of Jesus, and who enters into an alliance with Him, there is no languorous ease, no sheltered garden where he can slink out of the dust and heat. The love of God is a tide which will carry us out into the lives of others, and give us over to the throb of the world's agony.

But it means moving out too, in response to the assurance of God's love. The security which God gives is the assurance that He will never see us beaten. We shall be equal to every situation into which love may bring us. There is no dilemma into which faith carries us but there will be a way out. There is no trouble which meets us, if we have committed our lives to this love, which shall not turn to our advantage as His children.

Is there any calm like the calm of resting in this almighty love? It is the peace of the full river, glorious, unresting yet unhurried. It is the deep

assurance that love will conquer in the end, and already, through the victory of Christ, the situation is in the control of those piercèd hands. Stevenson's grandfather tells of an incident when the Bell Rock Lighthouse was building. The boat which held the workers was moored near the rock when a violent storm arose. The danger was lest the mooring-rope should break and the boat be carried out to sea, or smashed to pieces against the rock. For many hours they were in jeopardy, while the passengers sat trembling in the cabin unable to venture on deck for the heavy seas, and knowing nothing of what was going on around them, but fearing the worst. Then a little boy, who afterwards related the story, crept up on deck and there he saw what dissipated all his fears. The storm seemed, to his eyes, as bad as ever, but on the deck lashed to his post stood the watchman—and there was a smile upon his face. That smile of victory changed the whole situation, and brought back peace. There amid our troubles is our only secret of peace. Through the storm we may catch in Christ the smile upon the Captain's face, and know that all is well with the ship, if only we are faithful. God's love knows no eclipse except through our own fears and faithlessness. No storm can sink the boat which has Christ on board. You remember the story of Christ and the disciples upon the lake; how they trembled and gave themselves over to panic as the great waves lashed the sides of the boat and the whole sea raged in conflict. He rose and stilled the storm, the Scripture tells us. But it was not His highest way of giving them peace. It was not the way He would have preferred. He would rather they had trusted

Him enough for the storm within to be stilled, while they struggled with oars and sails to bring the boat to harbour. That is the true figure of God's peace, the heart at peace amid the storm, knowing the presence of Christ, sure of victory, and in the power of that peace struggling and fighting to bring the vessel through. That is the kind of peace He gives through the surrender to a great love. The early Church had it. Listen, "Troubled on every side, but not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; cast down, but not destroyed; dying, and behold we live; having nothing, yet possessing all things." That is the peace Christ gives through faith in Him and fellowship with Him, and that is the peace we are called to reach and make our own to-day—the only kind of honourable peace. We reach it through a faith that rests on the resources of our amazing Lord, while we follow Him out to battle. It is to that toiling, suffering, invincible faith that Christ calls us—not to the faith that confuses peace with ease and the untroubled life. His peace is found in a service and a fellowship which gives us together the troubled life and the untroubled heart.

I ask no heaven, till earth be Thine,
No glory-crown while work of mine remaineth here,
When earth shall shine among the stars.
Her sins wiped out, her captives free—
Her voice a music unto Thee—
For crown, more work give Thou to me,
Lord, here am I.

WHEN THE BROOK DRIES UP

"And it came to pass, after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. And the word of the Lord came unto Elijah, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee."—1 Kings xvii. 7–9.

WE know very little of the life-story of some of the greatest prophets. They often spring full-armed, as it were, into the light, to flash their message in a dramatic way on the situation which has summoned them. Here and there the curtain is lifted and we get a glimpse behind the scenes, where God is training them for the rôle they are to play in the limelight. Part of that training-ground is generally a desert. Moses heard his call in a desert. Amos was a herdsman from the hills. John the Baptist nourished his soul in those lonely quiet spaces. Jesus Himself was led of the Spirit into the wilderness, to find His way through the populous world. And it came to pass that God said to Elijah, "Go, hide thyself by the brook Cherith." There is a revelation that comes through silence, clearer and deeper than all speech. There is a companionship we meet in loneliness which no human friend can give. We reach it only when we are "alone with the Alone." The man who would be of most use to men must know what it is to be led away from men. Before we can become a

live wire of God's communications we must find our own deep contact with Himself.

This desert experience of Elijah was unusual. It was complicated with famine, in whose relentless grip the land was slowly dying. How or why this famine came the Scripture does not dogmatize, though it suggests a connection with Ahab's disloyalty to God. Famine is a periodic visitor to the East, where parching drought is one of the dreaded foes of nature. The important thing is not its cause but its message, for everything has a message for the ear that is tuned to catch life's meaning in God.

There was a message in it for Ahab. Elijah's business was to help him to read it. It was to bid him think deeply and see if this calamity was not finding him out in a wrong relation to God. Christ has taught us better than to look at calamities of nature as the vengeance of an offended God dealing out disaster. But calamities have their place. They can startle us and make us think, and perchance bring home to us some sin or moral twist, or reveal some deep dispeace of our souls, which was hidden from us under the placid waters of our life. Why is it when a great earthquake swallows up a city, or a mighty ship goes down, or a world-war sweeps nations into its vortex, the first thing people do is to ask questions about God? Some of them get no further, but even that is significant. It is the emergence into life of the fact of God. That is part of every man's consciousness, though often sunk fathoms deep under a load of trivial interests, and it only needs something big enough to stir the depths, for this thought of God to be released and bring us face to face with Him. But some people do go farther. They

begin to think not only of God but of themselves. When that happens, the central question of life is up for settlement—the question of our relation with God. The secret of all rightness lies there. Nothing is ever right for any man who is not right with God.

In the desert, amid the tightening grip of famine, God was speaking to Elijah. Part of the message was the loving care of God. "Get thee hence, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith; and thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." So far so good. But it came to pass, after a while, that the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land. What about the care of God now? That was what Elijah was going to learn. And the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." Elijah obeyed the message, and then follows that remarkable story of the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil which never failed, till rain fell on the burnt-up pasture, and life held out a full hand once more to the starving nation.

Now, what had this experience to say to Elijah? It was a message, surely, of the need of deeper resources than the surface world can supply, and of the call to trust them. Living by the brook Cherith, drinking its waters, and fed by the ravens was one stage of existence—the natural stage. These were the direct and simple supplies of the earth. In a sense he depended on nature for his security; though nature, for Elijah, was never less than God's hand at work. He had won the secret of life, which is to see God everywhere; the sable wings of the birds bring-

ing food had the glint of angel pinions. But the brook dried up. What did it mean? His eyes were to be opened further to the ingenuity of God's love. His faith was to be quickened into deeper levels of dependence. The anchor of his trust was to be cast into a deeper ocean of God's care. "Arise, go to Zarephath . . . for I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." God was going to use a finer instrument, but one less apparently dependable—a starving woman's faith and love. Is there any one who, on the surface, would have given much for it? Faith and love are the biggest things in the world for a man who has seen Jesus, but they seem frail indeed in the face of famine. There is nothing like hunger to take all that is fine out of the heart. It can reduce people to the jungle level, and especially a mother watching the red glow of health die out of her children's cheeks. But Elijah trusted God's guiding, and went to make his strange request. He is almost ashamed to make the appeal. He brings it in as a kind of after-thought. Yet the woman rises to the appeal of faith and love which somehow Elijah awoke in her, and brought him into a little fellowship in which the problem was solved and the famine was kept at bay. The secret is that through faith and love they had made a circle through which God could work.

It seems to me there is a message here for us even about the material problems of our life. There are crises which can never be met, save as we meet them in fellowship, where faith and love are brought into play. Take the famine at our doors, for instance. The word is unreal to most of us, perhaps. It is the most real word to thousands in Europe and in our

own land at this moment. It stares them in the face in letters red-hot with agony. The loudest voice in all Europe to-day is the echo of this woman's hoarse cry, "I have but an handful of meal in a barrel: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die." What are we to make of such problems? It will not do to say they are extraordinary, and leave it at that. Times of depression come, like these recurrent famines in Israel, but we have not won the power to manage our common life till we have won the mastery over these. Scientific skill has found the way to counter Nature in many of her wild moods. But this and other kindred problems demand something more than scientific skill or human dexterity. They are human problems, rising out of the life we live together. And the message of this story is that they cannot be solved save by faith and love. As a writer puts it, "The only possible advance in a world like this is by ways which are only open to faith and love." Nothing will meet the complexities of our modern world but the deeper qualities of our nature called into play and working in fellowship. That is the message which is ringing through our land to-day, and we are all coming to see it. All sorts of people, disillusioned and baffled by selfishness and brought to a standstill, are demanding a new adventure of goodwill and industry—the spirit which sees beyond the shadow of a man's own narrow life into the lives of others. What many people do not see, who are afraid to launch out, is that this faith and love are more than the ingenuity of our baffled wits. They are the impulses of the Spirit offering to us the resources of God.

But the incident applies to other spheres of our life. Take our human affections, and the love which makes life rich. People find their happiness in each other's company and set up a home together. They have common interests; the world is good to them; and life goes along smoothly and pleasantly for a while. But the time comes when things are more difficult. They have to meet strain together, or health is not so robust and tempers become peevish, or the surface attractions fade. They come to the end of the temporary and often shallow things which first drew them together. The brook dries up. What happens then? They drift apart, it may be keeping a brave face to the world while the home is starving in a famine of love. We can see it happening in case after case around us to-day. We call it misunderstanding, or a misfit, and the human problem becomes the subject of Royal Commissions and the theme of the realistic novel or the shallow play. But the real root of the trouble is spiritual. There are plenty of lives which have come to strain and friction, and then have found the way out in deeper levels of living and finer springs of love which is real. Love and friendship are of God, and they cannot be sustained apart from Him and the faith and unselfishness, which are the deeper currents of our being. You cannot make a home anything more than a glorified lodging-house, except as it is built upon the foundations of trust and self-sacrifice. You cannot found a friendship which will last, on anything less than trust and forgiveness and goodwill—those gifts which have their origin in God. As Lord Rosebery says, in his studies of the great men of the last century, "The base of everything is character";

and all character is rooted and grounded in some vision of God, deep enough and strong enough to carry us over those unlit patches when life grows weary, and the surface motives fail, and the brooks of self-interest dry up.

The same thing holds true of service and philanthropy. It is easy enough to be kind and charitable when things are going well. There are moods when a kindly spirit seems to be in the air. We become well-disposed to other people; we long to help the under-dog; social service becomes the fashion. But dull times come. People we try to help grow uninteresting, sometimes disagreeable; it may be they turn and rend us. This may not be mere ingratitude; there is a root of independence about most people which sometime or other makes them resent favours. They kick against the necessity which brings them to need our help, and we get the brunt of it. But sometimes it is sheer blindness to our motive and our goodwill. The very people for whom Christ poured out His heart's blood turned at last to crucify Him. He had a time of popularity when they gathered about Him with cheers and wanted to make Him king. But the brook dried up. What then? Have we ever had that experience? Have we ever sought to help men who turned on us with base reproaches? What then? Had we resources enough to carry us through? Have we the kind of stamina which will keep us going on, helping people who hate us and misunderstand us and would even crucify us, if it were the kind of thing which is done to-day? No man can do Christ's service to men without His own deep resources. Only the hands which are willing to be pierced and go on helping, can

touch the human sore with healing. And for that we need His compassion, His love, His fellowship. The best of human unselfishness is not proof against the kind of thing which crucifies—either by the recoil of ingratitude, or the bitter insight into life's appalling pain and need. The most kindly human temper will not serve in the hour of disappointment when the brook of man's faith in man dries up.

The same is true of what we usually call the Christian life. There are moments when it seems easy enough to follow Christ. We have resources in ourselves for what it seems Christ wants us to do. The example of others or the common decencies of life carry us through the ordinary temptations. When the kindly faces are round us, it is not so difficult to be true. And we read of the agony of the saints and their cries to God and all the extravagant language of the New Testament with amazement. What does Paul mean when he pleads with men to "put on the whole armour of God." What can it mean to "resist unto blood"? Does all this language not seem a little hectic and strained? But the brooks dry up. What then? When things go against us, and the kindly faces are gone, or when we go to a strange land or some great city, where we are flung into a maelstrom of unbelief, and things we were taught to hate begin to speak to dim instincts in the blood, and there is a quiet smile for the man who takes religion seriously, what then? Or when we come up against the cruel facts of life and our faith begins to burst into question marks, what then? When we begin to see what faith really means and some big call to sacrifice meets us, clear as the dawn,

and red and cold with warnings of a troubled day, what then? Or when some wind strips off the fair garment of our own good opinion and we see ourselves with all our hypocrisy laid bare before the challenging eyes of Christ, and the shelters of our pride are down, what then? Then we must strike deeper into the resources of our faith, or perish. We must explore the knowledge of God, or die. We must find a vision of God big enough to meet the big problems or make us willing to accept perplexities. We must face the question whether Christ is a reality we can trust all the way. We must find that love which is a refuge not from the storm, but from our own fears and our own ease-loving hearts, and trust Him with all the abandon of faith. We must make a new venture in the life of prayer. The Christian life is a miracle or it is nothing; it is a new creation, ever renewed and renewing itself in God; it is a "root out of a dry ground," as the prophet said of God's Servant. You cannot explain it, or sustain it, through any mere contact with its environment. There are plants that can live through a drought in a desert. They have various ways of doing it. Some of them live by holding in their leaves or surface roots enough sap to carry them over an average time of drought; nature is wonderfully ingenious in its mechanism for meeting the struggle of life. But some of them have no such visible resources, and men wonder how they live at all. Their secret is that their roots go down twenty and thirty feet, or more, and tap some perennial spring hidden in the crevices of the strata. No blight or drought above can reach their foundations. They are in contact, so to speak, with the very basis of the world. That is the way

with the life of a Christian man; it is a hidden life, "hid with Christ in God."

Time and again the Church has come to live a surface life and to rely upon prestige, or power, or her standing in man's favour. Then has her real power decayed. It was a poor boast which one of the Popes made once to a friend, "No more can the Church say, like Peter, 'Silver and gold have I none.'" The reply came swift and cutting deep, "And no more can she say to wearied and broken men, 'But such as I have I give unto thee. Rise up and walk.'" Christianity cannot be sustained in a world like this upon the fickle fountains of popularity or social prestige. We cannot keep the inner life alive with the power which shall save ourselves and redeem the world, but by striking our roots deep into the inexhaustible fountain of Christ's own passion for men. Our deepest life is in our union with Him who won a constant victory over the world, defying its winds to blight His Spirit, or its cruelty to slay His love, and rising from a grave into newness of life.

Perhaps the truth which flashes from this incident is one we have never grasped — our real life is spiritual, not material. Christ put it in a word for Himself when hunger faced Him in the desert and tempted Him with the desperate need of bread. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." We learn that lesson in various ways. Sometimes we grow up into the knowledge of Jesus as the flowers rise up from the cold enveloping soil to find the sunlight. Our very instinct would teach men their need of God if only they would heed the voice of

their own deep nature. A modern scientist, discussing the evolutionary process by which the fish developed the power to live on the land and the reptile found the power to fly, suggests the secret of the great adventure. "We are forced to recognize a kind of unscientific trustfulness which seems to be engrained in all living things." By faith they launched out from what seemed their only possible environment, and in launching out into the larger world found the power to live in it. Faith is not unreasonable. It is the most common of all the instincts. What is repressing and overlaying this instinct for God? Is it our pride of knowledge, or the cares and riches of life which are checking the finer shoots of the soul, or choking our roots like a pot-bound plant? If only we would let the soul speak!

There is another way by which men learn to seek for God. Life teaches them. Something happens sooner or later to break this slumberous content. It comes to pass that the brook dries up. Money takes wings and flies away. Business grows difficult. Those we love are taken from us one by one. Cold famine meets the heart where once there were streams of friendship. Health passes and nature withers in the once strong frame. Or what is just as bad, the blight of disillusionment falls on our once pleasant world, and old joys lose their power to charm. And at last death threatens us; life passes like the shadow of a dream, forcing us into a strange universe, alone. The brook dries up. What then? Can we not see in all this process something so inevitable that it must be the very pressure of God forcing us, for very life, to strike our roots deep into the soil of some abiding reality? It is His

ministry of detachment breaking ties, that we may stretch forth the tendrils of faith and find links with the eternal.

> All which I took from thee I did but take,
> Not for thy harms,
> But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.

At a recent meeting of the British Association a speaker pointed out that there was "not much hope for civilization, so long as men were obsessed with the idea that progress came only through fuller stomachs." It is a crude way to put a great truth. The way of selfishness is a side track, and nature ever and again along the road puts up the barrier whose name we call disaster, saying, "No road this way." Is life growing greyer for any of us? Do the brooks dry up? Have we come to some valley where life is parched and bare? Listen! There are springs running underground, and God is striking a silence through your life that you may hear the trickling music of the stream. "There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God." Be still, amid His desolations. Be still, and know that He is God.

PEACE THROUGH SINCERITY

"Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."—Ps. xxxii. 2.

THOUGH we find these words in the Old Testament there is no better definition of the peace of a Christian man. We might take them out of their setting and transplant them into the middle of the New Testament and no one would know they had not been uttered by some Christian saint out of his experience of the grace of Jesus Christ. It is the genuine doxology of redeemed souls everywhere, telling the world what God has done for them.

Lifted from its context it looks like a picture of what we call the upright man whose conscience holds no reproach. "The man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity" would seem to suggest one at whose life even God cannot point an accusing finger. But the context forbids a picture like that. The whole tenor of the Psalm is against it. It is written evidently by a man who has had much to hide and has indeed been hiding much, both from himself and from God. It is supposed to have been written by David after the great fall which flung a shadow over his life and brought him into a moral tumult. His sin shattered his self-complacency, flung down the barriers of pride and self-respect which had been sheltering him from reality; there is nothing which

can "stab the spirit broad-awake," in Stevenson's words, like what he calls a "killing sin." His soul was exposed, shuddering and naked, to the piercing rays of God's purity. When a stone is lifted, letting in the light, the creatures which live under it begin to wriggle and twist, making the most desperate efforts to escape from the blinding rays which strike upon every sensitive nerve. That was David's condition at first. It was a state of hell, the hell of the raw conscience which can find no peace and no protection. He describes the experience. "Day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me. My moisture is turned into the drought of summer." Pitilessly fell the rays, like a sun upon a treeless landscape, till they were like to shrivel his very soul. Then he took another line. He faced the light which was beating down upon his conscience. He opened his life to God, seeking no shelters of his own, making no excuses, offering no satisfaction, looking his sin straight in the face with all God's light upon it. "I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid." Then came peace. The very love from which he had tried to hide became his shelter. The very light which hurt his wound had healing in it. The reproach that stung him was really burning with the fire of love. "Thou art my hiding-place, O Lord. Thou wilt compass me about with songs of deliverance."

> Ah, faintest, blindest, weakest,
> I am He whom thou seekest,
> Thou dravest love from thee
> Who dravest Me.

And he took up the song and sang it—the song of the redeemed, "Blessed is he whose transgression

is hidden, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."

The Christian experience has many roads into it. The city of God has many gates. Bunyan in his great allegory describes only one. He tells how a man living in the city of Destruction suddenly awoke to his sin. There was nothing remarkable about him as a sinner. He was just an ordinary man whose soul had given him no trouble. He had committed no dreadful crime. But one day reading in the Bible, which is God's mirror, he had seen himself and his surroundings set in the eye of God, and a strange weight fell upon his spirit as real as a load upon the back. He fled from the city, leaving everything behind him, to find deliverance from his burden. Bunyan describes the experience as if it were the only path into the Christian way. There are other ways, of course. We may come to know Christ through our need of a friend, or the need of some one to captain our soul in a great fight with the long odds of circumstance. Some men come to Christ as masterless men of the olden time used to gather round a leader, seeking some splendid and heroic quest. God forbid that we should rule any one out of His Kingdom because he has not come in by our door! But whether it be soon or late, the hour will come when the mysterious burden will appear. The glory of that city, which is the light of Christ's own face, will reveal the stains upon our garments. Peter did not realize his sin till he had been a disciple for some time. As he saw deeper and deeper into the nature of Jesus, he saw deeper and deeper into his own, till one day he came to cry, "Depart from me,

for I am a sinful man, O Lord." The farther on Christ led him, the more life taught him his own weakness, till the very crisis in which his loyalty was most needed revealed a streak of baseness in his blood, suddenly cropping up like a fault in a mine and bringing to ruin the golden promise of his new-found friendship. One of the perplexing things about Christianity is that Christ's demands are pitched so high, they seem to invite our failure. The call of His discipleship draws us into an intimacy in which His love humiliates as well as comforts. The heights are bracing; the sunlight is stimulating; but it is difficult to keep our footing there. How shall we bear the searching and the challenge of that love whose very splendour seems to condemn us in the moment of its attraction? It is almost like the moth with the candle; there is a brightness which fascinates the creature, but in the centre of that blazing glory there is a flame whose touch is the crippling of its wings. Here is the problem of redemption—how a sinful man can be without guile, exposing his soul with utter sincerity to the light of God, and yet be conscious of a peace which is blessed, a heart of joy that overflows with music—"a man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."

This word "guile" is a very suggestive word. It suggests the common way of dealing with a reproachful conscience. The common way is to deal with it by guile, by some stratagem of the mind. It is an almost irresistible temptation to the best of us to put up shelters for ourselves against the blinding judgment. And there are many kinds of shelters

into which we creep for the security of our souls and try to find a kind of unsettled peace.

There is, for instance, the way of self-excusing. We say to ourselves that we are not so bad as our own conscience would have us think. We take refuge in phrases about the frailty of poor human nature. We are erring creatures at the best, and God who knows us through and through will not demand more of us than we are capable of being, and will not judge us harshly. After all, we are all in the same boat. And on the whole perhaps we convince ourselves that in our gloomy self-reproach we are taking our sin too seriously.

Or we build the shelter of good works. We scan the other side of the ledger where memory has recorded this good deed or that in our favour. Or we give ourselves to good works, determined to make up for the past by doing all the good we can. This kind of strategy is at the root of the whole system of penance wherewith men and women have tortured their lives, seeking by the pain of the body to cleanse the stain of the soul. "In Mr. Dimmesdale's secret closet, kept under lock and key, there was a bloody scourge. Oftentimes this protestant and puritan divine had plied it on his own shoulders, laughing bitterly at himself the while, and smiting so much the more pitilessly because of the bitter laugh. It was his custom, too, to fast, not as a means of purifying his body and rendering it more fit for heavenly illumination, but rigorously as an act of penance." So Hawthorne describes his penitent putting up his shelter of self-inflicted pain against reality. But it was all the strategy of guile, seeking a peace through evasion of the light.

There is another kind of shelter too, in which we take refuge. It is the thought of what some other has done for us, even God Himself. The most blessed truth of all knowledge is the truth that Christ died for us. Toplady's old hymn has that truth in it which is the one anchor of our hope:

> Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in Thee.

But there is a way of stating that truth and resting in it, which may be a mere evasion, a mere shelter from a sin we refuse to face. We may lift up the Cross of Christ between us and the thought of sin so as to hide us from the sting of sin's reality. One man may die for another, taking on himself *some* of the consequences of the other's sin—for the deepest consequences are within the soul of the sinner himself; but can any one carry our responsibility for our own deeds and leave us in a moral world? The innocent may suffer for the guilty, and continually do, but are the guilty any less guilty? Can any one who has faced his sin accept a peace of conscience in the thought that another has died for him, without so lowering moral value as to work havoc in his own soul? There is a way of looking at the sacrifice of Christ, and accepting the sacrifice of Christ, which may lessen the sense of sin and make us take a lighter view of its horror and shame; so opening the path for future sinning. Such a view may break down barriers which conscience sets up between us and the evil thing. It may close the wound without purging the poison. In Paul's words, it makes the Cross of Christ of none effect, and puts Him to an open shame.

Whatever happens, we must face the truth of sin, without shelter and evasion. We must look into the face of accusing purity without guile. There is an honourable and a dishonourable peace, and there is no peace with honour in the face of God which comes through evasion or self-excusing.

How, then, are we to find this peace which comes with utter sincerity? All our evasions are rooted in a wrong view of God and His relation to us and to our sin. If we track them down, we will find they come from the thought of God as a stern judge or a ruthless creditor who demands the uttermost farthing. So long as our relations with God are seen in the terms of the law-courts and the counting-house, so long will this demand for some kind of shelter remain, and so long will we continue to find no peace there. But that view of God is the very view from which Jesus came to deliver us. He came revealing the unseen order in which God stands to us. It is not that of a judge in the courts, or a merchant with his account books; it is that of a father in the home—a relationship of love. Turn to the story of the Prodigal Son, and you find there the very heart of God's attitude towards us. When the prodigal comes back, he expects to find a judge or an angry man he has defrauded, who will only let him return on certain strict conditions—which, however, he is willing to fulfil. "I will say unto him, 'Make me a hired servant.'" Let me work off my indebtedness by the sweat of my brow. But to his surprise, he finds a father waiting to receive him in a welcome of love, which will let no shadows from the past cloud the "glad confident morning" of hope.

This is the essence of forgiveness. It is not the cancelling of the past; for the past can never be cancelled. The consequences of sin will remain. The money is spent, for one thing. Nothing can ever bring it back. And the disgrace of sin remains; there will be the whispering tongues of the scandal-mongers who will find the story of his sin a spicy morsel of gossip, and will take many a chance to cast up to him his own misdeeds. And there will be habits to overcome and lurid pictures from the past rising to fill his mind with tempting suggestions in days of dreary drudgery. We cannot get rid of the past by any jugglery of the mind. "The scars remain," Gough used to tell his audiences, warning the unwary. The scars remain; forgiveness is no magic means of erasing them. Forgiveness means restoration to the fellowship of the Father, who takes us back to our own place in His love. His welcome is the call to step back, "just as we are," into full and unclouded sonship. He does not demand the repayment of any debt, before He takes us back. If there are debts to be paid as part of the consequences of sin, they will be paid out of the blessed peace and power of that forgiveness.

For this fellowship is the only power which can enable us to stand up to the consequences of sin. It gives us power to face them, by giving us the right attitude to them. It enables us to accept them as God's appointment, turning the very scars of sin into a means of humbling and tenderness of spirit, and making of our bitter memories an angel with a flaming sword, to keep us from going back. So the very consequences of sin, faced and borne in loving obedience, become built into the structure of a new

character, like a house built out of ruins. As Phillips Brooks says: "The only way to get rid of the past, is to make a future out of it."

In this task God stands in with us. To face the situation into which sin has brought us, is as much a divine task as any great service which meets us; and God comes into it to help us through, with all the resources of His grace. Amid the shadows of moral failure we may be as conscious as anywhere else of "the Hands which reach through darkness, moulding men." No doubt the son would insist on telling the whole story to his father, hiding nothing, screening nothing, while the father listened with a breaking heart which filled his eyes with tears. But here is the point. Nothing in all that sad story was suffered for a moment to bring a shadow between them. It was full and free forgiveness, pardon to the uttermost. There was no imputing of iniquity. Nothing in the past was allowed to stand for one moment between the son and the completeness of the father's fellowship, which is salvation. O the measurelessness of the Divine forgiveness! "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgression from us." This is the peace of the unsheltered soul. It is the peace of the man who, facing his sin and all its consequences with utter sincerity, finds God utterly and only love.

Some people feel that the story of the Prodigal lacks something of a full gospel, because there is no "cross" in it. But is there no cross in it? Can we read it with any imagination without seeing the Cross printed on the father's heart, as he lingers on the brow of the hill morning after morning, hungering for the boy's return. For what is the Cross, so

far as we can see into its depths with our purblind eyes, but the mighty assurance through all our wandering, that God loves us still. Calvary was the great moment in human life, when through the heaving tides of passion the waters swept back and there stood out uncovered and indestructible the rock of God's eternal love. This love, indeed, cannot be true to itself, in the face of our sin, save at the cost of agony; but it is this love, seeing our sin with the piercing insight of love, which is the secret of our forgiveness; and not any stratagem of our reproachful conscience.

What does this peace demand of us. It only demands that we step into the order of love. It asks only that we should accept the place of a son, taking our new life as the gift of God's mercy. This is the great message of the gospel which broke into music in the soul of Luther, and set the half of Europe singing, "The just shall live by faith." Salvation is there, for us, in that restored fellowship with God. We have nothing to do but take it. And out of that fellowship springs the power to change life to the roots, and make the whole world new. Only we must be utterly sincere, not seeking in this fellowship any escape from sin's reproach or consequences, save by God's victory over them in enabling us to meet them victoriously. It is God's love we need. To know that is salvation. His fellowship is the heart of everything. And the self-excusing which hides from the pain of God's light, hides from the healing of God's love. The shelters we put up against the truth are the barriers we set up against the Divine forgiveness, "If ye walk in the light . . . as He is in the light, . . . the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanseth you from all sin."

It is not an easy thing, this utter sincerity. Forgiveness is free, but it is not cheap. Penitence is no passing moment; it is the permanent attitude of the forgiven life. We dare never lose the penitent spirit, or we risk losing that sensitiveness by which we are aware of the wonder of God's love, for the peace and power of God's forgiveness is like the pearl in the oyster; it grows only in the heart which is kept sensitive to its own wound.

The acceptance of forgiveness means stepping into the order of love—and not only to God; for love has no limits. It means coming into the order of love in all life's relationships. It means the attitude and way of love all round. That is the meaning of the Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor. His own debt was cancelled, but he went out refusing to do the same for his creditors, and found to his dismay that forgiveness was therefore denied to himself. Surely the deep meaning of this is plain. God forgives us by lifting us and calling us into an order of love, in which we have to live our lives all round. It means opening our hearts from day to day to all the demands of love in daily contact with our fellows, in all our outlook on the world's need. The Christian world is anæmic to-day, because we will not face the logic of God's love and open our eyes to the reality of its demands. What will this love demand of us in relation to the sinful, the sick, the heathen, the people who hate us and have done us ill, those whose lives are in our power? It is not an easy thing to be forgiven, to be lifted into this order of love which is our peace. There is nothing in it of what Myers calls "the torpor of a foul tranquillity." It is the kind of peace which Christ found on His Cross, in a

heart made sensitive by fellowship with God to the sin and suffering of the world.

> Heart, are you great enough for love,
> For a love that never tires?
> O heart, are you great enough for love?
> I have heard of thorns and briers.

These high levels were beyond us, were it not for the assurance of a love which only awakens need to satisfy it, and only sets a task to give us power to do it. It is a terrible thing to rise into the grasp of this "tremendous Lover"; but the peace He gives is the only peace in which a son of God can rest. It is the only peace the world cannot break, for it is founded on the indestructible reality of the love of God in Jesus Christ.

THE REMAKING OF MANHOOD

"Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk."—Acts iii. 6.

WE can hardly read these chapters of the Book of Acts without a certain sense of wistful regret. It was a time of miraculous things. Thousands of men and women were literally made anew. Long crusted habits of sin were broken, and a new fresh life begun which filled the soul with happiness and power. It seems to us as we read these chapters, that there has passed away a glory from the earth. Inevitably the question arises in our minds—Has the touch of Christ still its ancient power? May we expect such marvellous changes to-day? People have talked much of the failure of Christianity. Is it true that it is a failure to-day? Is it true that we cannot recapture, in these days of knowledge and wisdom, the early glory? Is its power gone, so that we must look for a different gospel? And indeed there are many new gospels which are springing up everywhere, some of them fungus growths arising out of the despair and darkness of men's hearts.

The story raises the whole question of how we may expect Christianity to get to work upon our lives. It is all very well to use great swelling words about the power of Christianity. No one disputes

the fact that a vital faith in Christ, widespread in the community, would penetrate our life in every direction, and bring a wonderful transformation. But the practical question is, where the power of Christ is applied and how it gets to work? A great deal of the disappointment that some people feel with regard to Christianity arises because they are expecting, in a way, too much from it; or rather that they are looking for its results in the wrong quarter. We are expecting the fruit without the root. We are looking for external results instead of making sure of that inward contact with Christ in the remaking of the soul which is the secret of all other transformations. There are people, for instance, who tell us that the Christian faith ought to be the healing power for our bodily sickness. For them the test of faith is, whether it can take a man who is lamed by some disease and set him on his feet again without the aid of doctors. The prosperity of the medical profession for them has grown up around the failure of Christianity; the doctors are able to live because Christianity is dead. They take the Apostle Paul to task with his thorn in the flesh, and tell us that he had no business to endure a bodily weakness, that if only he had had enough faith he might have been rid of it! It is true, one of the effects of the Christian challenge to this man at the Gate was the healing of his body. He was lame; he had to be carried by other people, and the first thing the grace of God did for him was to make it possible for him to walk on his own feet. That kind of miracle happens; it has happened to other people besides this man. But it was not the essence of his cure; it was only one effect of it. His weakness, so long continued, was not a weakness in

his muscles only; it was due to some failure deep down in the roots of his life. The man was impotent within. And when Peter touched that weakness within the will, the man got strength which overflowed his weakness and carried it away, and he went out walking and leaping and praising God.

There are people, again, who are looking for the effects of Christianity in an addition to their comfort —in new conditions of physical life. If we had more Christianity, they tell us, we should not have the slums of East London, or any other slums; we should not have people working for a starvation wage; every one would have enough to eat and enough to wear. They would turn Christ into a great philanthropist and Christianity into a propaganda for social reform. There are men and women who are crying out for better conditions for whom practical Christianity is summed up in the gift of a living wage and a decent house to live in. And these things will be part of the fruit of vital Christianity. There is no other way of bringing them in. The new world of which we dream will come in when Christ comes in, and not till then. The better world of our dreams is the creation of the Christian mind and imagination. The New Jerusalem vision was born in heaven, and from heaven it must come or it will not come at all. "Direct Action" will never bring it; the devices and schemes of men, however beautiful, will never bring it; class interest will never bring it; self-interest will never bring it. As a writer says: "You cannot make a permanent society by tying a bundle of selfish folk together with some rotten string of class or self-interest." Christianity alone has the power

of social betterment. But the truth is, it is not comfort Christ offers us in the first place; it is the mind to work for some other body's comfort. It is not higher wages He comes to give us; it is the spirit which works for something higher than wages. It is not security He offers us, not relief from hardship; it is, in the first place, the courage and faith which conquer hardship and rise above it, to win over it a victory of the spirit. Turn to this story. The man was lame. He was a beggar. He had been a stretcher case all his life. He had been living amid ill conditions. His case touched Peter to the quick, as he looked up with hunger in his eyes. But Peter saw beneath the surface need and the pitiful weakness of the man begging for a dole to keep body and soul alive—right down to the real trouble, which was a trouble of the soul. His first act was to refuse material help. "Silver and gold have I none," he said. "Do not expect these things from me. But I have a gift for you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk on your own feet. Bring your will into action. Overcome your weakness by putting forth the strength you have. Become a new man, renewed in the secret fountains of your being. That is what I can do for you. "Such as I have I give unto you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk."

Now what did the apostle do for that man? The solution of all our troubles lies in getting a real grasp of what it is that Christianity can do for us, and setting its power to work in our lives to-day. In this incident we get an illustration of how Christ works, and what His power is able to achieve.

In the first place, He works within the man himself,

the individual man. That is His first point of attack upon the evil of life everywhere—through the heart of man. And He works by renewing man's nature, thereby transforming the character from within. This is not to say that better external conditions will not help. There are people who can never be reached till they are attacked through some change in the conditions of their life. They are so sunk and embittered that their mind and soul are almost incapable of listening to any Christian appeal, much less of responding to it. When Moses came to the children of Israel with his great emancipating message of God, "they hearkened not unto him for anguish of spirit, and cruel bondage." If it were for nothing else but to get home with a message for God, it is the task of a Christian society to attack the evils which desolate the human spirit and keep it in bondage. But better conditions will not work the real miracle of a remade manhood. They will not change the man, nor brace the impotent will. They will not alter the wrong desire, nor renew the fountains of vitality. We speak of giving man a richer life, a larger life, and that is right. But what if there be no *life* at all? What if the will be weak and the soul sodden under evil habit, and the whole nature set upon things that are unworthy? What if the man's soul be poisoned with selfishness so that his homelife is a wreck—and that happens when there is plenty of comfort, in a mansion as well as in a slum. What if there be no life? You can change a common bee into a queen bee by feeding it upon a certain kind of diet, but it takes more than diet to change a man's moral nature; it takes the grace of God in the heart. How many people are

there about us to-day, whose first need is not more comfort, but more character; not more pleasure, but more heart for life's battle; not a larger house, but a sense of eternity and a new relationship with God. The root of all things in heaven and earth is there—What is our will like? Do we will the things that are highest? Do we will the things which make a man happy and strong, and brave and true, the things that make life "life indeed" and not merely existence. And are we able to carry out what we will? Are we master of our own house? Are we able to direct our life to the things which God gives us all to see as the best? Do we will, day by day, the things for which Christ lived and died, and can we carry them out? It is this will of ours which is the secret of all effective manhood and womanhood. And it is in this secret place of being that Christ works to change us and renew us within. What was it that happened to this man, when that spring was touched? He became a man and not a helpless thing. He was able to direct his life, able to enter into happy relations with others, able to make his own contribution to life, able to use his life in the interests of Jesus Christ and for the purposes of His Kingdom. His whole personality was remade. And he went walking and leaping and praising God.

Now that is what Christ can do for men to-day, and that is our greatest need. What is more, He can do it now. That is where all other reforms fail; you have to wait for them. You will have to wait twenty, thirty years till the slums are effectively dealt with, and the housing conditions made fit for men and women to live in. Social reform must come gradually; but Christ can take a man living in these

present conditions, at this moment, and make him a new man, victorious over his surroundings. It may take years to get the public-houses closed; Christ can take a man sodden in drink, with a public-house at his door, and turn him into a sober self-respecting man, master of himself. It will take years to bring in a new system of things, to make business life more Christian, and social life more brotherly; but Christ can take a man in any business, and give him the power to live to the full a straight, clean, brotherly life, saved and endowed by grace. There are people who often say to us that it is impossible to be a Christian man, or to live a Christian life in present conditions. Here is a man in a slum-dwelling with filth and squalor on every hand. How can he live a Christian life in a place like that? It is hard —God knows how hard. It is a miracle, a moral miracle, but it is just the kind of miracle that Christ can work when He gets into the heart. There were saints in Cæsar's household, according to the New Testament, and the worst conditions of to-day can hardly prove a bigger handicap than the environment of Nero's palace. Yet there were saints there, saints by the moral miracle which God works within the soul, renewing a man in the depths of his being, to goodness and purity and love.

To take up the position that a man cannot live a redeemed life in certain evil conditions, is to deny what the New Testament stands for, which is "Eternal life in the midst of time"—in the midst of any kind of circumstance—"by the strength of God, and under the eyes of God." To deny the redeeming power of God in any circumstances, is to give up that faith which is the only leverage by which God can

raise the world. Christ can do this for a man—any man, anywhere: He can produce that eternal life, that new vitality from which everything springs—the desire to change things, and the power to change things. "Silver and gold have I none," said Peter, "but such as I have I give unto thee. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise up and walk."

Now how did this miracle come about? Can we trace the process by which this man was endowed with spiritual manhood and made fit for life? It was a case of what people call suggestion—the means by which an idea is induced in a man so strongly and powerfully, that it takes hold of his being and awakens his will to carry it out, or to believe in it. But what was it that gave the power to the suggestion. It was the name of Jesus. "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, I say unto you rise up and walk." It looks like magic, but it was not magic. Doubtless the cripple knew something about that name. The whole district, the whole world in which he lived was ringing with it. The very air was radiant with the afterglow of the resurrection. The name of Jesus was not a mere name. It suggested a whole series of things. It called up a picture, a story —"Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, whom God raised up," as Peter put it to the magistrates. And doubtless there was that in Peter himself, born of the secret presence of Christ shining in his soul, which conveyed something of the very presence and power of the Master, so that to hear Peter speak that name, and to be in touch with him, was to be thrilled and moved by a sacred influence. Christ shone in those eyes of tenderness; Christ spoke in those tones of courage and hope; Christ so overshadowed Peter that

his whole personality conveyed the atmosphere of His presence. Perhaps that is where we fail to-day. It is because there is so little of Christ in us that when we speak the name, it is only a word which falls to the ground like an autumn leaf, a fluttering, feeble thing, with no vibrant appeal of the Christ throbbing in our tones, no Christ accent, no splendid compassion and faith. Perhaps that is where we fail with men who know nothing of Christ. We do not carry the impression of Christ Himself—a living presence, a redeeming spirit, with the print of the nails upon Him, and the lustre of the resurrection, able to bring back into the world the power of all He was and did when He lived in Palestine of old. The great need of the Church to-day is to recover the power to suggest Jesus, to think with His mind, to speak with His voice, to use His methods, and employ the tactics of His love. The men of the Navy used to speak of "the Nelson touch"—that way of doing things which would embody the best traditions of the service. It is the Christ touch which will make the Church victorious in her campaign. At the suggestion of that name two or three things happened. In a moment the cripple saw a picture of the man he might be, walking and leaping and living in the fulness of his power. That vision came to him at that moment as a possible thing. As it took hold of his imagination, his doubts and fears were scattered and the burden of impotence was lifted from his will.

We have been learning, of late, that the real obstruction which keeps the will weak is something in the mind. "We can, because we think we can." The great achievement of Jesus was that He made

men believe the new life was possible and set the will free to live it. Perhaps this man had been in the depths of despair. Every time he would rise to walk, his weakness came to his mind and hypnotized him into defeat. How many people are there like that to-day? They have a weakness; they have failed; they have gone down in days gone by. And their very failure hypnotizes them into defeat, so that they cannot rise when they would, and are flung back against every movement of their souls into the old dungeon of despair.

Or perhaps it was custom which had lain heavy upon him. He had grown used to his weakness. He had always been so, and time and habit had softened the calamity. But custom had become a tyranny, a chain. He had no expectation of being better, and that very dullness and apathy had settled down upon his soul, preventing him from trying to rise. That is the case with some people too. Those who try to lift their fellows out of some evil plight tell us that there is nothing so hard to battle with as apathy. Its victims cannot be roused to better things. They are stupefied, hardened, chilled, so that no enthusiasm can kindle a spark in the eye, or bring a flush of hope to the heart.

Or perhaps this man was quite satisfied with his condition. He had got used to it, got to like it, and to find a certain security in it, till the world where he would have to work became a terrifying place demanding more energy than he was willing to give. There are slaves that grow afraid of freedom. There are prisoners who get so comfortable in their prison, that the wide world becomes full of fears, and liberty loses its attraction But when this vision of Christ

shone in upon his soul, awakening the desire of a fuller life, and bringing the hope of it, these chains were shattered—these weights of despair, and custom, and fear which had settled down upon him were lifted, and the will was free. Are there some of us who are down? We have gone under, and lain down to our sin or our circumstance. We despair of the new chance, or the fuller life. Let us get close to Christ and listen to the spiritual suggestions which He breathes into the soul. There is pardon; there is peace; there is redemption. "Sin shall no more have dominion over you." "I am come to seek and to save that which was lost." "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." It is all there in Christ. Silver and gold has He none. Comfort and security He does not promise. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Life is a fight, but it is a fight on terms which will make it victorious for the man who will listen to Christ, and dwell in His presence. It is said that when Cromwell rode over the field where his men were being flung back, his very presence brought back such courage and hope, that their souls were renewed to a victorious energy. The very air was palpitating with new possibility, with the sense of mastery and victory. So it is when Christ comes into the field. The whole situation is changed. Will you open up your life with all its impotence and weakness to Him—the hard conditions in which you have to live, the close dungeon of your mind, where you fight with temptation? That is the secret of victory. He will not carry you; Peter did not carry this man. He will not make your conditions easy; Peter gave this man nothing to smooth the path for his crippled limbs.

But He will give you something better, the clasp of His own strong hand, the contagion of His radiant Spirit. He will touch the spring of your will. He will speak to your heart a word of power and courage. He will say to you, "Rise up and walk," and at the magic of that voice you will have strength to obey. The whole universe of God's grace is waiting to back you, waiting for that act of faith, waiting for that step into the light, and love, and splendour of the new life.

VICTORIOUS GLADNESS

"And at midnight Paul and Silas sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them."—Acts xvi. 25.

THE power of song is proverbial. There is a magic in it which can charm the heart out of its most sullen moods. There are songs that have won battles. There are songs that have led crusades, gathering up into them the spirit of the movement and giving it the power to renew the heart. A nation's character is expressed, if not in part moulded, by the songs it sings. "Give me the making of the nation's songs," says some one, "and I care not who makes its laws."

> One man with a dream at pleasure
> Shall go forth and conquer a crown,
> And three with a new song's measure
> Can trample a kingdom down.

But never more wonderful results followed from a song than from this of our text, "At midnight Paul and Silas sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." And then the Scripture goes on to say, "and the prison-doors were opened, and the prisoners' bands were loosed."

It appears a trifling thing for the writer of this story to mention, that the prisoners heard them. How could they help hearing them when the song of Paul and Silas rang through the quiet prison chamber at

midnight? The difficulty, one would imagine, would be not to hear them! It seems so trifling that we feel the writer of the story would not have put it there at all unless there had been something remarkable in the fact. The exciting events of the night—the earthquake, and the bursting prison doors, and the conversion of the jailer—would all have hidden from the writer's mind a little fact like this if he had not felt it worth noting.

"And the prisoners heard them." When we look into it we find there is a deeper meaning. It does not mean a mere casual hearing, a mere sensation. The word has the sense of "listening." Whatever it was that struck them in Paul's singing, they were interested; they were listening with their minds enlisted, giving themselves up with attention. That is the meaning of the word. And it has still a deeper meaning. In the Greek of the Bible it is only used in one other place—where Samuel charges Saul with his want of perception of the voice of God. Can we not draw the conclusion that these prisoners were listening as men listen to the voice of God, with their hearts attune for some message of God, with their conscience quick for some word of truth; in a word, with all the secret barriers down by which men are accustomed to shut out God? Is it too much to suppose that conversions followed from that singing and changed lives? And is it drawing too much upon the imagination to suggest that Luke got his information about this incident from one and another of the prisoners themselves, when in the little meetings of the Christians, they told how the grace of God came in a song at midnight and found them in a prison and won its way into their heart? At all events, the

picture Luke draws is worth thinking about. "At midnight Paul and Silas sang praises unto God: and the prisoners were listening to them."

To begin with, it is worth noting that they sang in the prison at all. It is about the last place one would have chosen to sing in, the last kind of time to sing, and the last kind of attitude for singing. They had been flung into this prison to keep them from preaching, and soundly beaten, and their feet locked fast in the stocks. And in that condition, and at midnight, Paul and Silas sang praises unto God. I always look on that as one of the most triumphant moments of New Testament Christianity. The same kind of thing must have often happened. These people were accustomed to sing in all kinds of situations. And that is what faith ought to do for us; it ought to give us the power to sing in all sorts of devastating and difficult circumstances. It is easy enough to be happy in pleasant circumstances when life is sunny and bright and everything is going well. The man who cannot rejoice in the beauty of the world around him and the glad and gracious gift of life, when the sun is shining and he has home and work and friendships, is a churlish creature—or there is something far wrong with his health. But to sing in a dungeon, and at midnight, when happiness is a victory and cheerfulness is a miracle, that is the special gift and grace of Christianity. "For we glory in tribulations also." "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers trials." "As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing." That is a Christian secret—the serenity and gladness of faith; and more, the exuberance and buoyancy of faith, so that it can sing in a dungeon, even joke on a scaffold, and shout a challenge into the face of death.

That kind of spirit is a characteristic product of the Christian faith. Though one could hardly say it is showing that product to-day. Some of us have got into the doldrums in spite of our Christianity—some, one fears, because of their Christianity—mistaking solemnity for seriousness, and a careworn look for a deep interest in the salvation of others. Here were two men who had given up everything because Christ had filled them with a passionate longing to preach the gospel to all sorts of people they had never seen; these people took them and flung them into a prison, and their faith so kindled in that prison that they burst into singing and were indeed joyfully triumphant. Let us get hold of the fact that this is the genuine spirit of New Testament Christianity. "The true saint is always hilarious." Faith in Jesus Christ is able to make a man independent of circumstances and superior to his surroundings. He escapes not *from* the prison *in* the first place, but in the prison. "At midnight Paul and Silas sang praises unto God."

"And the prisoners were listening to them." They had an unseen audience. They did not know the prisoners were listening They were not thinking of the prisoners at all. They were thinking of God and His goodness and His unconquerable and all-providing love. But all the time the prisoners were listening to them.

Our unseen audience is one of life's most familiar facts. We cannot do anything, say anything, but others are watching us, noting our bearing, taking stock of our conduct and our whole attitude to life. We may not know it; they may not know it themselves. Consciously or unconsciously the one half of

the world is playing eavesdropper to the other half. It is the basis of that tremendous fact of influence whereby something is always going out of us, if not to mould the lives of others, at least to shape the world in which others have to live. When a great politician addresses a meeting, be it large or small, he knows that his biggest audience is beyond him, among people he has never seen, who are waiting none the less for his message. It is with this responsibility in his mind that he speaks, or ought to speak. But this is true of every one of us. We have all our unseen audience. There are people taking their cue for life from us. There are some whose attitude to the highest things is partly being decided by us. There are people who are taking their view of Jesus Christ from what they see in us, not consciously perhaps, but by the secret process which goes on all the time. We cannot "break the bonds which God decreed to bind." We cannot insulate the current of our influence on others.

Furthermore, what gave this unseen audience the hearing ear and made them listen so keenly was the fact that they were fellow-prisoners. They were suffering the same fate; they were chafing under the same bonds. That suffering gave them a quickened interest. They were keen to know if Paul and Silas had any light on the situation. They were eager to learn what it was that made them so cheerful in the prison—what the secret of that strange victorious thrill in their singing? It was more than curiosity that made them listen; it was need and sympathy. It matters not what be our lot of hardship or trouble, we are never alone. There are always our fellow-prisoners, and their fellow-feeling

keys up their interest till the slightest suggestion that touches their trouble will set their heart-strings throbbing. Have you ever noticed how a man who has some illness will listen if you tell him of just such another case as his? In one of Mark Rutherford's letters he tells how after writing his autobiography—a book which relates a sad and depressing story of tragic experiences—there came thousands of letters from people who told him he had described just their case. He had his audience, unseen, of fellow-prisoners, and that fact made them listen to him. It matters not what be our difficulty, or temptation, or loss, we are never alone; there are others all around us in the same prison-house of sorrow or gloom, and that fact makes them listen to us. It opens their ear. It focuses their interest. What a chance this reveals to us of helping others! What a bracing challenge it throws to us in our suffering! What a noble responsibility! Whatever hardship life gives us to bear there are others round us whose ears are tense with interest and whose hearts are sensitive with pain. They are looking to us to catch the inspiration of our spirit. Have we a besetting temptation? There are others with just that fight to make, and they are watching us to see how we carry ourselves. Are we mourning? Here is another in tears, and he is looking for some strong hand to lead him through the valley of the shadow. Have we a cross to bear? Some other is near us on that stony path, looking for the light upon our face. In whatever prison life has put us, we are never alone. The prisoners are listening to us.

Now this is surely, to begin with, an argument for

a cheerful spirit. If Paul and Silas had done nothing by their singing but to put heart into these men they would have done good service. To make the prison ring with melody, to bring gladness into tired eyes and new hope into sullen and discouraged lives—surely that is a great ministry, the very ministry of Jesus Christ. None of us probably realize how much we can do for the world about us just by sunny gladness and a cheerful spirit. "The day was dark and gloomy," some one once wrote in the *Boston Herald*, "but Phillips Brooks came down Newspaper Row and all was bright." There are people whose very presence can chase the clouds away and scatter gloom. They go about "lighting fires in cold rooms." Stevenson was sunk all his life in one of life's darkest dungeons—the dungeon of ill-health—and he took it as his mission in life to turn his dungeon into a lighthouse. He made a task of happiness. "This is our post," he said of the place of trouble, "and our business is to make happiness for others." I put it to you, if it would not change the face of life for many people if we learned to say of our dark or difficult situation, "This is my post; I am on duty here, on duty by the appointment of God, and my business is to make happiness for others." One of the very subtlest temptations that can come to good people is the temptation of self-pity, and of all depressing people there are none so depressing as those in whom the divine gift of sympathy and pity runs inward, making a luxury of misery. Whatever happens to us, let us try to fling off the weeds of self-pity and put on the King's uniform of self-forgetfulness, exchanging "the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness," and, unconscious to ourselves, the midnight

gloom will be shattered for some other afflicted ones, even as Paul and Silas sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them.

But this was not merely a song of courage; it was a song of faith. That was why it had such a thrilling effect on the prisoners. It is a good thing to preach courage to men who are facing the storm, the simple duty of setting their teeth and going through with it. But there is no gospel in that, and it may sometimes be taken for an impertinence. The gospel comes in when you tell them of the presence with them in the storm of the Lord God. That is the secret of the difference between the Stoic and the Christian. In *The Cloister and the Hearth*—one of our greatest novels—the hero, sore downcast, is going through a perilous forest and is cheered every now and then by his stout-hearted comrade with this word, "Courage, comrade, the devil is dead!" The phrase served its purpose. It is as good as anything else to express the heart that is not afraid of shadows. But true courage has its source in faith, and the secret of faith is not pretence that the devil is dead, but confidence in a living and victorious God. The word that sets our pulses leaping is not the word that tells us to shut our eyes to difficulties. It is the word that tells us how difficulties can be overcome, and hardships vanquished, and sorrow transfigured, and all things made to work together for good. That was the song which Paul and Silas sang in the prison; and being what it was, born of the consciousness of God's presence, it filled the prison with the thought of God, and set free His love and grace in such a way that the crust of sin and indifference in these men's hearts was pierced and God broke in.

It is the same kind of story Browning tells in "Pippa Passes." The little Italian girl, a silkworker in a factory, has a holiday—her one holiday in the year—and for sheer gladness she goes out singing a song. But it was a song of faith, "God's in His heaven." And as she went along the street all unconscious of anything but her own glad heart and the loving goodness of God, the words and music floated into casements here and there and changed lives at critical moments. There were two people living in sin whose hearts were awakened to clean shame and real hunger for goodness. They touched the soul of an artist who was about to give himself up to an angry passion, and set him free. They reached the heart of an anarchist who had made up his mind to kill the king and stirred his buried patriotism. And the girl went home and slept her sleep, unconscious of what her song had done and her spirit had wrought by bringing to people a message that suggested God.

It is for this faith the world is listening, in spite of all appearances. As a writer puts it in a recent novel: "It may be true that men shall not live by bread alone, though there are multitudes who are doing it and doing very well on it. But I tell you that plumb down in the crypt and abyss of every man's soul, there is a hunger for better food than this earthly stuff." How is the world going to become convinced of God? That is the great problem. How are men going to be brought to see Jesus? Life does its part, by taking people sooner or later and bringing them into some kind of prison-house. For a time comes when life takes the man who shuts out God and walls him up in his own godless world with his own unillumined soul. Life plays its part;

that is the one side. But when people are brought into the prison-house? That is where our task comes in. "Ye are My witnesses," said Jesus. "Ye are the salt of the earth. Ye are the light of the world." Are there any more startling challenging words than these? Christ meant them, as He meant every word He said. It is a very extraordinary thing that when Jesus left the world, He left no other custodians of His truth and His message than twelve men whose hearts were kindled into a radiant faith—no books, no parchments, no monuments, nothing but a few souls with the inner lamp lit. And from those lamps the flame spread because it was the living fire of God, till Paul and others were kindled by it and went out to carry the flame.

Now how does faith shine? It has many beams. But one of its incandescent points is just this clash with circumstances, where the spirit becomes victorious in a serene and confident gladness which sings in a prison. There is something *tremendously convincing* in a spirit that can thus rejoice in trouble and sing a song of praise to God out of a dungeon. It suggests a secret spring, a hidden treasure. It makes men feel that somehow this man is in possession of a secret storehouse of vitality. It makes people wonder, and when people begin to wonder they begin to explore and are already on the threshold of some divine discovery. But more than that, such a spirit carries the contagion of its own radiant vitality. It suggests Jesus. Dare we say it does more. Dare we say it brings people into touch with the very Spirit of Jesus? For every Christian man is a Christian spirit who is alive in his being with the Spirit of Jesus. Have we never met with people, in whose bearing there was

something that so powerfully suggested Jesus, that when they went—leaving with us a lingering brightness and peace, which quieted and exalted our spirit—it suddenly came to us that we had been in touch with Him? For a moment His Face had looked in upon our troubled way. "Ye are My witnesses," said Christ. A witness is one who reflects something he has seen; and a Christian man, according to Christ, is one who gives his life to seeing something in Christ which he reflects to the world in a life which is victorious with cheerfulness in the most depressing circumstances and with love to the most discouraging people.

That is how the world is going to be redeemed. Men are not going to be argued into goodness; they are going to be won into it. They are not going to be lectured into the Kingdom; they are going to be "called" into it, called irresistibility by the worth of lives which are the product of faith in Christ. Perhaps our prison is deep and dark, our case is bitter, and our life is lonely. How can we reach this faith which sings in a dungeon? How do we get this plant which blossoms in the dark? "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" The great secret is a new look at that love of God in Jesus which is ours in Him, a love which is victorious over everything, a love which appoints our every situation and gives us grace to find in it some redeeming task or some deepening experience and some new discovery of His truth and love. There is no strange land for the man who has discovered that God is love and God is everywhere. The surface look of things may be depressing, but the same challenging, comforting voice is still in our ear, the same purpose is at work.

And the deeper the darkness, the sterner the circumstances, the more opportunity there is for the triumph of faith, and the more perfectly will we be able to help others whom suffering has swept within the orbit of our influence.

One thing is sure, if we live near to Christ and catch His Spirit in everything, we will never lack an audience whatever our limitations or our defects; and what is more important, we will never lack an influence. Never a life lived in the Kingdom, never a brave word spoken, never a true stand made but finds its mark in God's good time, in His own way.

> I breathed a song into the air:
> It fell to earth I know not where,
> For who has sight so keen and strong
> That it can follow the flight of a song;
> But that song at last, from beginning to end,
> I found again in the heart of a friend.

"My word shall not return unto Me void," saith the Lord God.

THE LAST STAND OF FAITH

"And they answered and said to the king, We are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."—Dan. iii. 16–18.

THE Book of Daniel is a story with a purpose. It was written to steady the hearts of patriotic Jews who were passing through one of the severest persecutions for their faith that ever men have passed through. The story is one of those beautiful things that crystallize out of the furnace of man's pain, to become a star in his sky and cheer him and his successors, whenever, on their way to God, the darkness falls upon them.

There is no need to dwell on the circumstances of the time when it was written, even though we knew the precise date. The stage is set for any period of time, for every trial of faith has the same elements. There is always, for instance, the golden image. Where will you find a better symbol of the material world and all its glittering appeal to the human heart? And there is always a burning fiery furnace —the threat of loss or suffering for those who will spurn the worship of the world and follow conscience. It is a picture of the eternal temptation, which comes in many different forms, to give ourselves to the

things that are seen, to money and fashion and what men call the solid realities, and fling away our faith in the unseen, which in the eyes of men looks merely so much folly. That temptation is the crux of religion. The final question of our loyalty to God is not intellectual, though we may persuade ourselves it is so. God meets us, not with a problem for the mind, but with a moral challenge in actual life. The question, really, is whether we shall bow down our manhood before the appeal of pleasure or sense and adopt the selfish standards of the world, or whether we shall be true to the inward voices of our souls and trust them as the whisper of God. That choice meets us all in small things as in great, and it meets us time and again. We may settle the question once for all in what we call the choice of Christ, and ever after it is easier; like a man going along a road with a fixed goal we have settled our direction, and it is merely a matter of going on. But even so, life meets us every now and then, as it did Jesus, with some crisis where we have to reaffirm our faith and say to ourselves whether we are going on. Or a day comes when the guiding light in the soul seems to burn dim. We become perplexed and are brought to a standstill and have to fight like Christian in the Valley of Humiliation with one or other of Apollyon's tribe, for the very life of our spirit. Few men who face life seriously in the name of Christ but have to meet this conflict, especially in a day like this. No man is properly equipped for the Christian way who has not found a method of meeting the last dark question of the soul and knows how to plant his feet upon the rock, when before him there stands the golden image and the burning fiery furnace, and he has to choose.

The message of this story, as I read it, and the picture of these three men, give us the right position and the final answer. Their stand is the stand of faith with its back to the wall, and theirs is the one stand which cannot be shaken. There are three stages in it.

To begin with, they did not shrink from the choice or try to evade the issue. "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter." They were not going to try to make the king think better of them than he did, or to burke the choice by any back door of skilful argument. They were clever men, and if they had cared to use their eloquence they might have found a way of getting out of the trap without either publicly denying their God or doing any disrespect to the golden image. Neither were they going to do any juggling with their own consciences to bow down to the image, for instance, with some private reservation of their own. Some people might have argued that it was better in the long run to save their lives that they might serve God in Babylon, even at the cost of a seeming surrender, than to let their influence be lost for a trifling scruple. There was a Mr. Facing-both-ways in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, you remember, and Mr. Facing-both-ways is a very familiar character. It is terribly difficult to be *in* the world and yet not *of* the world; it is fatally easy to be of the world's *spirit* though not in the world's *ways*. Some men never take a stand if they can help it, and then are careful to see they are in a good majority. There is a method called compromise, which is often only a way of settling big questions without either bowing down to the golden image or getting too close to the burning fiery furnace. This way very often

attracts us when we come up against the hard choices of life. Sometimes, however, we cannot avoid the issue. Let us thank God if we cannot. For with every choice God is meeting us with a chance to reveal our manhood and forcing us to take a step in vital living. Every choice is the Divine pathway of self-determination. "Choose Thou my path, I do not ask to see," may seem sometimes a very beautiful sentiment. But we dare not forget that this hymn of Newman's was written of that Church which treats her children like babes in a nursery, and discourages the use of man's own insight. In the long run there is no other method of finding our way except by choosing it. It is the Providence of God, His way of training us, to make us choose. The biggest hardship about the slave system, a writer tells us, is not the cruelties which are practised on the slaves, for in some cases the slaves were not badly treated; the deepest hardship of the system is that it takes away "the blessed luxury of choice." Freedom is a gift of God, but true freedom is only fully ours as we win it and exercise it in the choices of life. The insight to see our way is our most precious possession; it is the inward vision by which we see God. But insight only grows by meeting and making decisions for ourselves. Thank God if life forces upon us a choice between right and wrong or faith and no faith, which cannot be evaded. The worst thing that can happen to us is to find ourselves adrift upon an ocean so easy and calm it never brings us up against a situation where we have to grasp the helm and settle where we are going. The great thing is to face a dilemma squarely and seriously, seeing it with open eyes for what it is, without camouflage or evasion.

If we see it and face it fairly, the choice is as good as made. For no man can see evil with the naked soul and love it, and no man can see goodness with the open eye and shun it—if in the depth of his being he is ready to take God's way. So Daniel's companions faced the choice unmasked. "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter."

But now we come to the foundations of that faith on which they took their stand. First of all they took their stand trusting in what we call Providence. "Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace." They believed that God would see them through and would not let them down. After all, they said to themselves, this world is in the control of God. However strongly the game may seem to run in favour of evil, there are other moves open to God by which the plans of evil may be checkmated. The devil may set the world on fire, but "the framework of the universe is fire-proof." Wrong cannot heat a furnace which God cannot put out.

Whatever we may think of this ancient view of Providence as the benevolent interference of God—and the war has somewhat shaken it—it is well to keep an open mind. How the spiritual and the material are related we do not know. Wonderful forces can be set in motion, through prayer and faith, which defy explanation. The popularity of faith-healing and spiritualism, for one thing, are a revolt of the human soul against the crude dogmatism of matter. Whatever the laws may be that govern the world, they have a moral root. In the long run the universe is on the side of the man who is on the side of God. Deep down at the base of things, love fashioned the earth in

the interests of the Kingdom of God. Evil may play fast and loose with the world for a while, but only for a while. Sooner or later the men who kindle the fiery furnace are consumed by the product of their own evil genius. They who use force to crush righteousness are met and destroyed by the very forces they have called into being. Or what is better still, as Christ has taught us, the very suffering they create sets free the love which will smite them to the heart with shafts of shame and compel them in sore contrition to lay their weapons at God's feet.

Are some of us faced with an unpopular way for conscience' sake? Are we meeting loss in business because we have followed the clean way of honour? Then let us pluck up heart. Our way is still in the keeping of God, and He knows all about it. Countless people can tell of cases where a brave stand in the face of hopeless odds suddenly changed the situation even to their material advantage. There are no promises to that effect in the New Testament, else religion would be turned into a choice of the best bargain, and the teaching of Christ into "a handy book for the successful merchant," to use Stevenson's caustic comment on Pepys's version of seeking first the Kingdom. What God wants is the spirit that does not care for these things, but leaves them all to Him. The paradox of the Kingdom is that He does care for the material things of those who give up caring for them. That has often happened. Consequences are God's department. "Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king."

But the faith of these men did not rest there, for

that standing-ground is not deep enough to meet the facts of life, in the tempting moment. We do not know what happened at this point. Perhaps they heard a titter, or saw a sneering look on the faces of those who were standing round; perhaps they heard a cynical whisper, "We shall soon see." And it flashed upon them—What if God did not deliver them! What if they did perish after all! Where would they be then? What would be the good of it all? And just as suddenly the assurance of God's love and care shone up in their soul. Even if God did not deliver their body, His love was stronger than death or hell. The finest passage in the whole range of English literature, according to Professor Saintbury, is the famous lyric about love, "Love is strong as death." What gave that passage its lyrical beauty was just the overwhelming sense of love's power and preciousness, its victorious endurance. Shall the love of God who put it in man's heart be less than the love it created? When Luther was making his last brave stand they sent an emissary from Rome to browbeat him. The messenger drew a picture of all the forces against him, kings and nobles in all their glittering array of pomp and power. "Where will you be then, little monk, in the face of all these? "There, as now," was his answer, "in the hands of Almighty God." Was it a vision of this almighty love which flooded the hearts of these men as they made their stand? Did they realize that to do His will and keep His love in a great loyalty, is its own reward? Was it a glimpse of His Face that shone upon them which made them "endure as seeing Him who is invisible." Was it this that taught them the noble answer, "And if not, be it known unto thee,

O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up"?

Or is there another view? Were their hearts visited by a dark doubt? There is a lingering doubt of God which haunts the footsteps of faith, seeking some moment when our hearts are off their guard and sorely tempted, to get in with its treacherous suggestion. Show us how your God works and we will believe in Him. How do you know that this religion of yours is not a great illusion? How can you be sure that there is a God at all, or that in this universe there is anything else except blind chance or some soulless power in whose eyes we are of no more value than the leaves that fall from the trees in autumn? How do you know? Where is the proof?

That is the kind of suggestion which the man of faith has to meet time and again out in the world and in the lonely spaces of his own soul. I wonder if any of us, though we may have been all our lives professing Christians, are ever visited by the question whether there be a God at all, and whether our experience is not just some cruel illusion. Are there some of us perhaps who have been vexed by the suggestion that we have nothing to answer the sneer of the world and no real grip of faith at all? These moments meet nearly every man. Is there a faith which cannot be shaken? Is there any stand which we can take which is irresistible, which, if we take it and hold on, will God hold us fast in the strongest current?

This brings me to my point. There is, in the last resort, no proof of religion by argument, though faith has its intellectual buttresses. But deep down

below all arguments the proof of religion is a vision of something which you see to be supremely good, of something for which, in fact, you discover *you are willing to die.* That was the position of these men. They were losing their faith or losing their lives, faced with the choice between faith and the furnace, and they suddenly discovered that loyalty to God and purity and reverence were things for which they were willing to die, things which were far better than prosperity and riches, the favour of kings and and even life itself. "If not, if we have to die, be it known unto you, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." What is that thing which they had seen? F. W. Robertson has a well-known passage in which he makes the same point, "When everything is wrapped in hideous uncertainty I know of but one way in which a man may come forth from this agony scatheless. . . . If there be no God and no future life, even then it is better to be generous than selfish, better to be chaste than licentious, better to be brave than a coward." But what is a man doing who is staking his faith on that inner value? He is staking his life on God, or to put it in terms of Jesus, he is taking his stand for the things for which Christ stood, the precious things which grow up and bloom in the shadow of His influence—for when we stand for Christ we are standing for these things, or we are not seeing Jesus at all. That allegiance of our souls in the moral crises of life to goodness, and purity, and love is the reality of our allegiance to Jesus. All we need to do is to recognize it and to ask whether the life that shone in Jesus be not the heart of the universe.

In any case this is the last stand of faith, the faith which cannot be shaken. It is the deep assurance, striking the spirit with a gleam of heaven's own light, that goodness and righteousness have a value which no earthly standards can measure. They belong to the realm of the priceless. They shine by a light which borrows nothing from the world's rewards and which cannot be dimmed, though sun and moon withdraw themselves. These men had reached rock-bottom. Even if they were burned up in the furnace and all their dreams were mist and their faith a pathetic illusion, still they knew it was better not to worship the golden image. That was their confidence, and no power in earth or hell could shake it. He who takes that stand in a dark hour is unassailable. And he has his reward. For the truth he holds with his feeble hand will turn out one day to be a Hand which holds him. The light he sees will grow till he finds it none other than the Face of God. Standing with his back to that wall he will discover that the wall is the pressure of God's love.

So Daniel's brave companions found it. God responded to their faith, as He always does. The response was of two kinds. On the one hand it came in the kind of men it made of them and their larger influence for God in the community. They were bigger men afterwards and every one felt the deepened power of their victorious personalities. It is true the writer of the story represent them as having been miraculously saved in the furnace. The Old Testament people were always looking for this kind of marvel. They were always hoping for some miraculous intervention of God; it was their view of justice. But God's miraculous entry into human life, as we

know in Jesus, is through the miracle of a victorious man, whom faith in Him makes more than conqueror. How do you explain the life of Jesus? It was the product of a soul living in perfect faith, with undimmed consciousness of God the Father. A life like His is the clear proof of faith. For His courage, His peace, His serenity, His loving-heartedness, are God's response to the man who will stand where Christ stood and for the thing for which He stood. Agnosticism cannot create a personality like Jesus. The denial of God cannot create a life like His. Only faith in Christ and in the God who comes to meet us in Him can produce the same kind of life, the same quality of loving, the same victory over sin and suffering, and hatred and death. That is the proof of faith. It touches springs of power which can remove mountains. It awakens love in loveless hearts. It comes into a crippled soul, to make it strong, and a man in bondage, to set him free. The triumph of these men in the furnace was a miracle, but their spirit was a greater miracle, and that miracle was the creative act of God responding to their faith.

But there is another response—the consciousness of a Divine fellowship. There appeared in the furnace with them, "One like unto the Son of Man." God's great answer to our faith is the assurance of what we call His presence. We may not realize it in feeling, but we know. All kinds of men have had it who have made the great stand and taken the adventurous way. Read the simple autobiography of Dr. Wilfred Grenfell of Labrador. His faith was very elementary at first. He tells us he stood for Christ because the one shining reality in his life was his mother's unselfish love. That was the thing which was

priceless, the thing for which he would have been willing to give his life. But as he followed the great adventure and stood for his faith through years of hardship and self-denying service on the wild coasts of Labrador, he says: "God strengthened the foundations on which my faith stood till Christ now means more to me as a living presence." Paul had the same experience. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" That was his way of putting it. Some people may call it fancy, but it is idle to cast doubts on the experience of men till we have been where they have been.

The sense of Christ's presence does not always come to us in the same way. But in some way it comes, the deep, sure consciousness that He and we are one. And it comes when we go out to stand for Him and with Him, out beyond the little interests of our own life to where love meets the sin and suffering of the world in the shadows of Calvary. F. W. Robertson was once talking with a lady who was taking him to task for his views. She ended by saying she would have to inform the authorities. He replied, "I don't care." "Do you know what happened to 'Don't Care'?" she asked. "Yes," was the answer, "He was crucified on Calvary." There is a deep meaning in that. For all who go out to follow truth and right in their naked faith will come to a cross, but there they will find Christ and in that shadow know the brightness of His presence.

Faith is a rock whose foundations strengthen only as we stand upon it. It brings its own certainty only as we are willing to trust it. We cannot keep faith alive by merely trying to preserve it, any more than we can keep the leaves of last year's summer alive by

keeping them in a glass case. Faith lives and grows as we live by it out in the world. It awakes at first in various ways. The stirring of some chance word, a mother's love, will bring it; most of all it awakes as we open life up to Jesus and listen to the voices of the soul which rise to call Him Lord. Have you felt the movings of that Spirit within? Go and live for the things He bids you stand for out in the world. Stand for Him through everything, and one day you will find that He is standing beside you.

I give you the end of a golden string,
Only, wind it into a ball:
It will lead you at last to Heaven's gate,
Built in Jerusalem's wall.

TRAFFIC AND DISCOVERY

"They that go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep."—Ps. cvii. 23.

THIS was a great confession for a Jew to make. By nature, he hated the sea; there was nothing of the seaman in his blood. The sea was his favourite symbol of unrest; it was the mark of separation from his beloved land. In the picture of the perfect world of his dream which came to John in Patmos, all the secret distrust of his nature comes out in one pregnant line—"And there was no more sea."

But the men of the Old Testament, though they hated the sea and never ventured forth unless they were driven by necessity or drawn by the lure of gold, had to admit that the ocean voyager knew secrets which did not come to men in the shelter of their farms and quiet villages. The ocean came to be looked on as the stage for God's most thrilling and awesome unfoldings. "Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path is in the great waters." They who would see God's work and wonders at their best must "go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters."

This is a very literal truth. The sea seems to leave a special mark upon the nature of the men who sail it. There is something unique about a sailor at his best which life in a cramped world at

home is not able to produce—a generosity, a charm, a blithe cheerfulness and ready resource which are the sea's own special gift. And further, the sea seems to leave its mark upon the deeper nature in its outlook upon God. Mix with the fisher folk around our shores who daily battle with danger to win the harvest of the sea and you will often find a deep reverence, a sense of wonder, and a generous faith, which men in other callings tend to lose. In an article on the work of our fishing fleets during the war there is a tribute to this quality. "Nor have they forgotten," says the writer, "to see the ancient works and wonders in the deep. Many of them drink and curse, but more of them are quiet God-fearing men, with a Bible in their kit, and a fist of iron for the face of the wicked." Part of it is due, no doubt, to the larger field of experience. The sea is never the same. It can change in a moment from calm to storm, from the glory of unimaginable beauties which overwhelms the soul to the misty shroud which shuts life up in an eerie silence. If God is to reveal Himself fully He must have a stage that is roomy enough for His grand effects.

But there is more. There is something in this voyaging which quickens the nerve of spiritual perception. The tragic thing about a life of dull routine with the same grey walls round us, is that it deadens the power to feel and see, and keep our touch with God. Some people never seek God till they are at the end of their own resources. There is a divine conspiracy in life, when we take it seriously, to force us out of scepticism into prayer.

> And lips cry, "God be merciful,"
> Which ne'er cried, "God be praised."

But in the ways of ordinary life we become immersed in things which never make any deep call upon the spirit. Life goes past in the pursuit of what we some day recognize as shadows. We take our fill of shadow pleasure and tease ourselves with shadow troubles, till one day some big experience touches a deeper chord; and then

> the dream
> Is broken which had held us unaware,
> And with a shudder we feel our naked soul
> In the great black world, face to face with God.

The Psalmist describes the experience to the letter with all the vividness of life amid a storm at sea. "They reel to and fro. They stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He bringeth them out of their distresses. They that go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep."

A word like this has always meaning beyond its literal truth. If men have met things at sea which they did not meet on land, the reason is not that these experiences could not be found at home, but that the grapple with the sea awakens the mind which can meet them; and with that mind we can meet them anywhere. Life itself is often spoken of as a sea. A man who is at his wits' end in the confusions of ordinary living, will confess he is "at sea." Like the sea, life has its mystery of the unknown, its changing experiences, its risks and its dangers. No one knows what may meet him any morning, even without going a step from his own door—what soul-stirring moment, what tide of joy, what wave of trouble. On this sea of life there is

one experience which is open to us all, the crowning point of life—to see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep. But who are the men who find this meeting with God? Not they *who hug the shore* or seek the sheltered haven like some timid craft which fears to put out to sea. It is they who hear the call of life with all its possible risks of pain and sorrow and strain and death, and go out facing life bravely to take what comes. But more, we must face life in the interest of some high purpose—some call of the Spirit. Plenty of people meet life with a certain reckless swagger, boasting that they are ready to take what comes and are afraid of nothing. But they are not sailing the seas of life to do business. They are out on pleasure or following the track of self-interest. And the point about such purposeless voyaging is that it does not lead us into great waters, except as by accident we happen to be caught in a storm. Many a man engaged in what the world calls big business is sailing very shallow seas. Selfish interests never take any one out into great waters. The selfish man shuns them and shrinks from anything in the nature of generous risk, and so he misses God, whose path is in the deep. No man can find God save as he is going God's way. Look in the Gospels for the occasions on which Christ revealed Himself most wonderfully to the eyes of the disciples. It was in the places of strain and trouble where they found themselves because they had followed Him, regardless of risk. One was a lonely road, where two men walked with the hope of their lives in ruins, because they had staked everything on Him. Another was an upper room where the disciples had withdrawn themselves, expecting

every moment that the mob would break in on them with fury to hale them forth to death. Still another was a storm at sea, where the waves ran high and they were beginning to think that everything was over, when the sleeping Christ awoke, and revealed His power in works and wonders on the deep. Once Christ came upon the disciples by the lake shore and found them dispirited after a night of fruitless fishing. His cure was not soft words of comfort, but a new challenge to effort. "Launch out into the deep," He said, and His words are a parable.

Perhaps there are some of us whose trouble is their narrow acquaintance with the deeper things of religion. Many of the hymns we sing, it may be, tell of discoveries we have never made and lay a heavy toll on our sincerity. Why is there so little depth in our adoration, so little uplift in the music of our praise? There may be various reasons for our disappointment. One reason may be that we are expecting God to appear to us in some heart-swelling emotion which will send us into ecstasy. If so, it is well we are disappointed, for there is nothing so irreligious as some forms of what passes for religious feeling. God comes in the truth made clearer, the heart made braver, the spirit made more loving. He appears in that deeper consciousness of His love in Jesus which changes the face of life and fills the common sky with wonder and gives the wayside flower the power to take the heart with beauty. But perhaps we have never found God near because we have never launched out on His business or given ourselves to His tide. We have never cut ourselves adrift from the bonds of calculating prudence, or let go in a great faith before some task in His service.

There is an idea that religion is supposed to meet the fear of death. The thing which religion came to meet is not primarily the fear of death, but the fear of life. That is the fear which grips some people most. They spend half their time and ingenuity making securities against its risk and danger and keeping out of the reach of trouble. One of the commonest lines of comfort when children die is to say that they are better out of it all, and we sometimes pity the children as they romp at play, thinking of what awaits them. It is a slur upon the love of God who made us and put us here, in such a world as this. The only man who is to be pitied is he who faces life without God—which means to face it without a whole-hearted acceptance of some great meaning in it and some great service through which that meaning becomes vital. Pain and trouble are the price of knowledge. If there is a heap of trouble, there may also be an exceeding weight of glory in the cargo we carry home to port. Stephen Graham has a great phrase describing the Russians with their patient acceptance of all that comes. "They have," he says, "acquired the habit of saying 'Yes' to life." Only by the brave and blithesome way of holding out both hands to life, can we have them filled with the gold of the Spirit. "They that go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep."

There are various tides which seek to lure us out on life's ocean. There is the instinct and call of love which seeks ties of friendship and makes us set up homes and undertake responsibilities. Very few people, I imagine, reflect when they make a home, to

what possible sorrows they are baring their hearts, what wearing hours of burden and responsibility they will have to meet if they are not to shirk the burden. Every true home where children are growing up is a perfect sea of adventure. It has been the fashion among some to look with a superior smile upon those who are struggling through life with the care of a large family, as if this loving bondage were a kind of folly. I wonder if any of us amid the inevitable sacrifices of home and the harassing cares or toil of children have been tempted to ask ourselves whether we were right to put forth on such an ocean. This word is a great tonic for such moments. There are wonders in those deeps which are found nowhere else. What light of heaven is seen in the starry eyes of children! What sense of God's Providence through the perplexing ways! What wonderful comforting in the bitter pain! What knowledge of the Father comes through the sharp anxieties of the daily traffic of love! Where shall we go to seek for God's wonders?

> Let us go, we have been long blind,
> To a place that is almost too near to find,
> A place that is Heaven, and Heaven's at home.

Mark Rutherford gives us a picture of such an unfolding. His wife was ill and everything seemed hopelessly dark. "I was like a man shipwrecked and alone in a polar country, whose existence depends upon one spark of fire which he tries to cherish left glimmering in a handful of ashes." But he made his discovery. For his step-child who had been something of a trial to him before, rose to unexpected heights of devotion and seriousness which became

to him nothing less than a revelation of God. "Fool that I was," he says, "not to know that the messages of God are not to be read through the envelope in which they are enclosed." How many people are trying to read God's messages through a sealed envelope which it will take the rough hands of life to break open, and at the same moment are shirking the very cares or fearing the very burdens which would do it, unveiling God like a wind that scatters a mist. "They that go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep."

There is another tide—the tide of Christ's great purpose of loving service. Faith is a great adventure, or it is nothing. Can we wonder that people miss God, whose lives are filled with trivial interests which bring a host of trifling, irritating troubles? There are cares that ennoble the spirit and make room for God, but there are cares that shut God out, cares that choke the heart as grain is choked with weeds. The gospel of Christ is a great medicine for care, but His way of dealing with some cares is to take us into a world where these cares do not reach us, for the spiritual climate does not breed them. Half the troubles of the world are born of petty interests which have no place in a large heart. The mind which is set on God's tasks and "does business in great waters" will have cares, but they will be such cares as a great purpose brings, such cares as fell on the soul of Jesus in the shadow of a Cross. For these there is God's own comforting, His own wonderful fellowship. Are we vexed and troubled about many things? Are they such cares as are worthy of one

who is living for Christ? Are they such troubles as we find on the way of selfishness or on the way of faith? We have simply no right to the serenity of faith till we have found our place in the adventure of faith. The comforts of religion to a self-seeking life is merely a drug for a deep-seated disease which really needs the surgeon's knife. We cannot expect to see God's works and wonders till we have "launched out into the deep" and are "doing business in the great waters" of His service and His compassion.

Are we out for the Kingdom? Are we seeking to open our souls to the troubles and trials of other lives? Are we bearing something of the burden of a world gone wrong, and seeking to right it? We must get out into these great waters — the ocean of human need and suffering where Christ developed His unique consciousness of God. Prayer means nothing to us till we know something of His weary soul, strained and bleeding in a ministry among the sick and suffering. Worship is "a dull mechanic exercise" to the man who has found nothing worthy to ask of God because he has done nothing to need His Divine restoration. Till we are driven by sheer pressure of the world's agony to find the power of God, life will hold no miracles of His grace. The Book of Acts is being continued to-day; it is the one book in the world which is never finished. We wonder why we cannot see such miracles to-day. It is because we need to repeat the faith and the daring, and the adventure of the men who did the acts. Then we would see them as some men are seeing them still. The slums of London are alive with such works and wonders; but the men who

see them are those who go down into these deep waters. General Booth tells the story of the adventure of faith which sent him there. "I hungered for hell," he says, as he went through these murky waters. "I pushed into the midst of it, I loved it because of the souls I saw." Then he went home to his wife, and said, "I have given myself and you and the children to the service of these sick souls." That is the kind of man who is never troubled by questions of the existence of God; he has the evidences in his contact with men and women whom God has redeemed. His memory is a Book of Acts. It is the same with the missionary in foreign lands. Every great missionary biography is a record of wonderful deliverances and miraculous providings, and of soul-moving cases of degraded and sinful people won, and mastered, and moulded by redeeming grace. Read the description of Uganda to-day and Uganda fifty years ago. It is a revelation of the works and wonders of the Lord. Why have we never met such wonders? Because we have never allowed the love of God to carry us into such straits. Why have we never seen such miracles? Because we have never tackled such problems. They belong to the men who "do business in great waters."

The truth is God needs a wider stage than that of our individual souls. "The field is the world," says Jesus. "His path is in the sea," says the Psalmist. To-day the waters of life are troubled with unrest in every direction. There are problems facing us which can only be solved by faith and love. Is the Church to stand back from the critical social confusions of our time and merely hold the ring for

contending parties to fight it out? Is she merely to be the umpire accepting the present rules of the game in international and industrial matters, or is it her business to declare the rules according to the mind of Jesus and insist on having them brought into play in all our relations with one another? Is she to be content with a message to the individual? It is in the individual soul, of course, that reformations are born; the new man makes the new world. But the new man is made, in part, by the vision of the new world calling to the depths of his nature and by the challenge of the tasks through which it is brought in. For Christianity stands for a love to be applied to life in all its relationships.

These are deep waters, some people say. Better keep out of them. You will get lost in the perplexing currents of economic theory for which you have no chart. You will get into difficulties, provoke resentments, rouse storms, risk rocks. Is the Church to hoist the flag of "Safety first," which never carried a true man anywhere except into a back-water? The Church is out in the world to change the world. She has something to say even in the region of economics, for in all economics there is a human factor, a spiritual factor, which needs to be taken into account. Our present economic theories are based upon a low view of human nature and the selfish motives by which it works. A new spirit would change things. Let the tides of faith and hope lift you and carry you; never mind where they take you. They will certainly take us into deep and often bitter waters; for that is where they carried Christ. They carried Him to a cross, but there He revealed the works and wonders of the Lord. The

Cross is the method of God's love in action, and His love has no other apocalypse of glory. The Church will begin to conquer the world when she makes the world hate her for her loyalty to Christ. When she begins to do business in great waters she will find God in the deep.

But last of all, this word has something to say to us about the great adventure of death. There is a Christ-created instinct which tells us death is only another bit of the great voyage of life. It leads to no still haven, but to a wider ocean of unimaginable adventure and discovery. This is Tennyson's view of death. It is not reaching a harbour, but putting out to sea. (Our thought of the after-life as a quiet harbour is a view which has alienated countless active and vigorous souls. It is the last word of a religion of comfort which vital souls reject.) And the fear of death is of the same nature as that fear of life which turned Hamlet's career into a tragedy of indecision, so that he would neither live nor die. The man who in Christ has mastered the fear of life has lost the fear of death because he knows a Love who is Lord of all things, making the unknown spaces a sphere for His deeper disclosures. When Christian in the *Pilgrim's Progress* reached the great waters he was timid and shrinking. "Be of good cheer," cried Hopeful, so he plucked up courage and went on. Then he brake into a loud voice. "Oh, I see Him, and He tells me, 'When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.'" So they crossed the river and entered the City and their raiment was transfigured, and all the bells of the City rang for joy. Do some of us fear this experience for our-

selves or for those who have gone from us through great waters into the deep? They have gone to do business there, and there they see the works and wonders of the Lord.

> For though from out this bourne of time and space
> The flood may bear me far,
> I hope to see my Pilot face to face,
> When I have crossed the bar.

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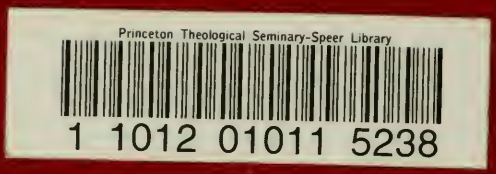
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